

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

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## THE TALE OF AUNT MARGARET'S TROUBLE.

IN SIX WEEKLY PORTIONS. FIFTH PORTION.

### CHAPTER XI.

At nineteen, life is very vigorous within us. Let the soul be harrowed and the mind tortured as they may, the body will yet struggle to throw off its load of suffering. My youth and strength asserted themselves, and physical illness was not added to the anguish of my heart's sorrow. It was otherwise with my aunt. Her frail tenure of life was sorely weakened by the shock, and we watched at her bedside with a dumb foreboding. Anxiety for her, and the necessity of attending on her, took me out of myself. The sharp present pain sometimes dulled that other heartache for a moment. But there were hours when my wounded love awoke and cried within me with an exceeding bitter cry; and the moaning voice of the vast eternal sea seemed but the echo of my little human woe. At first I could not speak of it. I could not think of it. I could only feel it. But by degrees I lost the overpowering sensation of terror that possessed me at the first agonising aspect of my grief, and slowly dared to look it in the face. For three days after my uncle's arrival, I was as one in a dream. Mechanically I went about my daily duties, and said no word, and asked no question. Mr. Norcliffe was constantly in the house, fulfilling the duties of a physician and friend with unobtrusive kindness; I think it was by his advice that they left me to myself, and forbore to speak until I should be prepared to hear. At last, as I have said, I took courage to look my trouble in the face, and I resolved to know all they could tell me. "I will hear it at once," I said, "and then——"

And then?——

I could see nothing beyond. The long vista of my future years, had held one figure journeying by my side. No matter through what trials we still should walk together. That had been my dream of life.

"Uncle," I said one night when the household were preparing to go to rest, and my aunt had fallen into a heavy slumber after a restless day, "will you come out with me on the beach for a little while? Aunt is asleep, and the servant

shall stay in her room till I come back. I want to speak to you, and I feel as if I should be stifled in the house. Will you come?" He pressed my hand in his, took up his hat, and silently we went down-stairs. A short flight of rough stone steps led down from the terrace on which the house stood, to the shore, and, once upon the wide beach, we were in absolute solitude. It was a warm dark night, with phosphorescent gleams upon the water. The soft wind, blowing seaward from the land, brought with it sweet wafts of country odours. Slowly, slowly, and in silence, we paced onward, until a turn in the shore showed us a distant light-house blinking with its red eyes far into the night.

"Dear uncle, I want you to tell me——"

"To tell you, my dear bairn?" For I had stopped and stood silent with my hand upon his arm.

"To tell me all about——Horace and my sister. I will only ask you this once, and then it will be over."

"I am glad you have spoken, Madge. It would have been my feeling to have had it all out before now. But others thought differently, and perhaps they were right."

"Yes, uncle; quite right. And——I want to beg one thing of you." He took my trembling hand and held it in a firm though gentle clasp. "I want you to try not to say things like——like——"

"What things, my darling?"

"Such as you said that night of Horace. I know what you must feel; but O, dear uncle, I beseech of you not to say hard things of Horace to me." I was sobbing with my head upon his breast.

"How shall I speak the truth and not say hard things of him?" returned my uncle, bitterly. "But there, there, my beloved child. Heaven knows I would not willingly add to your burden. I will do my best, Madge."

Then, brokenly and with difficulty, he told me what he knew about my sister's flight. "I suspected nothing," he said, "nothing in the world. It must have begun when they were so much together at Meadow Leas. He seemed moody, and did not spend so much time as formerly at the Gable House. At least, not with my knowledge. God knows what went on behind my back. Anna had full liberty, and, as for him, he was like a son of the house."

By degrees, I heard all that he could tell me. They had not left Willborough together. Horace had started by the night-coach for his northern destination, and Anna must have met him at some preconceived point upon the road. She was not missed for some time, having given out to the servants that she was going to spend a few days with the Gibsons at Meadow Leas. Neither my uncle nor I had the heart to follow all the windings of the scheme. A few hours after he had missed her, and had begun to feel uneasy at her absence, he received a hurried letter in Anna's hand, saying that any attempt at pursuit would be worse than useless, as before those lines could reach Willborough she and he would have crossed the Scottish Border, and got married. "I was half crazed," said my uncle. "As to sitting still at home, I could no more have done it than I could have flown to Scotland, and seized the throat of you—; well, well, I won't say it, my lassie. But that's what I longed to do at first. When it fairly came home to me that it was too late, I just flung myself into a post-chaise to come to you and your aunt. Talk of a man's strength! Yes, if fighting be the cue. But for endurance: why, the bravest of us is fain to lean on you frail creatures when Sorrow comes and sits herself down in the ingle-nook."

In all that my uncle said and left unsaid, I could trace the deep wound that Anna had given to his proud affection. He had loved her so. He had so gloried in her beauty and her high spirit, and even in her untamed vehement temper. He loved me fondly, and felt for me. No sympathy could have been deeper, more tender, more unflinching than his. But, for himself, the bitter smart was this: that her hand should have dealt the blow. That she should be false, treacherous, ungrateful! His pet, his bonny bairn, his darling! Strive as he would to throw the blame on Horace, there was a rankling sense of her unworthiness that wrung his kind heart cruelly, cruelly. Never again, on the rare occasions when my sister's name was mentioned between us, did I hear him speak of her by the familiar appellation of her childhood. It was "your sister," or "Mrs. Lee," or "Anna." Never Nan, or Nanny. Never, never, again.

When Uncle Gough had ceased speaking, there was a long silence between us. At last I rose (we had been sitting on a heap of loose stones) and took his arm. "Thank you, uncle," I said. "You are very good to me."

"Good to thee, my precious bairn!" All his full heart gushed out in a burst of tears and inarticulate ejaculations. He took me in his arms, as if I had been indeed the bairn he called me, and wailed over me as a mother over her sick child. We wept together until the passion had spent itself, and something like peace came down upon our souls. And, as we walked slowly homeward, the first glimpse of that, "and then," began to dawn upon me.

What if, though the bright glory of my morn-

ing were quenched for ever, there still remained long twilight hours to turn to account, ere the night cometh when no man can work! I was still very weak, very heart-sick, very miserable; but there was already a faint ray of comfort in the thought that I might yet be dear and useful to others.

When we reached home, the servant of the house was standing at the door looking for us, and she ran forward to say that her mistress was with my aunt, and that some one had been despatched for the doctor, as Mrs. Gough was awake, and seemed "mortal bad." We were with her immediately, and Mr. Norcliffe arrived soon after; but the first glimpse of her face told me, inexperienced though I was, that human skill was powerless to prolong her life. She died peacefully in my uncle's arms that night.

#### CHAPTER XII.

WE went back to the old house, Uncle Gough and I, to the quaint old house at Willborough, taking the shadow of our sorrow and our loss with us. I pass by the first pain of looking on the familiar scenes and faces with our changed eyes; I pass by the grief of the servants, the condolences of friends, the sympathy of humble neighbours. As my uncle had said, now that Sorrow had sat herself down in our ingle-nook, it was to me that he looked for consolation. He was a man peculiarly sensitive to a woman's influence, and peculiarly needing a woman's sympathy. Soft and unassuming as his wife's character had been, he had leaned on her for support in the every-day affairs of life, and had turned, in any trouble, to the never-failing solace of her wisely love. Now, she was dead, and Anna was gone, and Horace, whom he had loved so well, was cast out for ever from his home and from his heart, and there was no one but I left to fill the vacant places. What a sad autumn was that which followed our return to the Gable House! The summer had waned before we left Beachington, and my uncle and I used to wander arm in arm along the garden paths and through the shrubbery, ankle deep in fallen leaves. He seldom cared to pass the iron gates into Willborough, and few strangers crossed our threshold. But, once, old Mr. Lee came. He came one sunny afternoon, soon after our return home. I, sitting sewing by the window in the morning-room, heard the gate bell ring, and looked out to see who the unwelcome visitor might be. I stood up trembling, and my work dropped upon the floor.

"Margaret, what is it?" asked my uncle, looking at my scared face; then, following the direction of my glance, he, too, saw Mr. Lee, who was now almost at the porch.

"I can't bear to see him, uncle. What shall I do? Let me go away."

"Yes, child," said my uncle, with his brow knitted into the stern troubled look it often wore now. "Go, dear. He shall not disturb you. Why does he come here at all? It was a bitter hour when any of his name first darkened these doors."

I hurried away up-stairs, my knees shaking under me, and shut myself into my own room. There I stayed for above an hour, sitting motionless and dry-eyed on the bed, with a dull sick feeling at my heart. At last Hester came up-stairs and knocked at my door.

"Your uncle's love, Miss, and do you feel well enough to come and give him his tea?"

Then I knew that Mr. Lee was gone, and I arose and went down to my uncle. He said not a word at the time about his visitor; but I learned afterwards that the interview had been a stormy one. Mr. Lee, while deprecating the conduct of his son, had tried to act as mediator between Horace and my uncle, endeavouring to show that continued resentment on the part of the latter could only hurt himself, and was really uncalculated for. That the thing was done and could not be undone—"which," said my uncle, "was the sting of the whole matter"—and so forth. But it finally appeared that his chief object in coming had been to ascertain whether Anna's marriage would make any difference in the amount of her prospective inheritance. My uncle had always announced that my sister and I were to be the joint inheritors of what property he had to leave, and that it would be divided equally between us.

"I told him," said my uncle, speaking of this to me afterwards: "I told him that neither your sister nor her husband would ever be the richer by one penny of my money. She and he have chosen their way, and must pursue it together. But never, with my consent, shall any help go from me to them, either during my life or after my death. I have one niece, one child, one heiress. He wanted to see you, feeling sure, he said, that *you* would not wish this. But I told him, if you were an angel I was none, and that in this matter I would have my own way. So he left me."

I tried, of course, to alter my uncle's resolution. What was the money to me? But whenever I reverted, even distantly, to the subject, he grew so fierce and terrible in his anger against her, that I was fain to cease my pleadings, and leave it to time to soften him more effectually than any poor words of mine could. So, the autumn and the winter and the spring wore away, and the summer came round again in its appointed course. Twice during the year Mr. Noreliffe had come to see us, and on his last visit had pained me by asking me to be his wife. Pained me, because my own trouble made me tender to the genuine feeling of an honest heart. And it could never, never be.

"I don't ask for love, Miss Sedley," he said. "I know and respect your feelings. But if you could ever bring yourself to think of me—if you could give me any hope that time might change your resolution—you would make me a very happy man."

I think I did not fully know what my love for Horace had been, nor fully realise how that part of my life was lost to me, until I received this proposal. My uncle would have

encouraged it; and Mr. Noreliffe was a man every way my superior, and I was very sensible of the great honour he did me when he placed this high confidence and trust in me. But all that was over. I assured him that my marrying was impossible, then and thereafter. He took it like the fine-natured gentleman he was. And the last words he said to me on that occasion were these:

"Miss Sedley, if you ever need a friend's advice, or a brother's protection, will you believe that I should esteem it my dearest privilege to afford you both? Will you tell me that you trust me enough to ask me for them?"

This I could most heartily and gratefully assure him. There had been several letters from Anna to my uncle, and there had been one directed in Horace's hand. But Uncle Gough thrust them all unopened into the fire, holding them firmly in the blaze until the last fragment was consumed. My heart yearned sometimes for news of my sister. I had been thinking, dreaming, musing on her, and on Horace, all the year; and, as my first anguish softened, I began to ask myself if this estrangement were to go on all through our lives. He had loved her best. Was she not more beautiful, more attractive, than I? I thought sometimes that if they had only come to me, and had only confessed that they loved each other, and had asked that I should release Horace from his promise, I could have done it.

One bright day I had persuaded my uncle to drive some miles out of town, to a small property he had in a neighbouring village, consisting of a few cottages and some pasture-land. One of his tenants had desired to see him on, I know not what, business connected with some trifling repairs. It would be a change, an occupation, an excuse for a short absence from home. I dreaded to see him entirely lose his once active habits, and sit dreaming in the house day after day. I urged him to drive over to the village, and, having seen him set off in his high gig with the old mare, fat and frolicsome after her long rest, I took advantage of his absence to go into Willborough and make some house-keeping purchases. I had almost completed my task, and was nearing the Gable House on my way back, when I remembered that cook had asked for some sweet herbs, and I went into a shop to get them. We all know how subtle and potent is a familiar odour to awaken sleeping memories in the brain, and the smell of that shop invariably took me back to the market-day when Anna had gaily thrust a fragrant bunch of herbs over my uncle's shoulder, and we had first seen Horace Lee. Ome! How long, how long ago, it seemed!

The good woman who served me, put up what I wanted; and then, as I took the little parcel in my hand, she said:

"So we've got your sister back among us, Miss Sedley."

"My sister!"

I suppose my face turned very white, for I felt the blood rush back to my heart, and the

woman looked at me with a startled expression.

"Dear life, miss! I hope I haven't done wrong to mention it. I never thought but what you knew. Will you sit down a moment, miss?"

"No, no, thank you. But tell me—when did they—I mean how long—"

"How long they've been here?" said the woman, helping out my unfinished sentence. "Well, I'm not rightly sure, but it must be going on nigh a week. My master, he seen young Mr. Lee at Rotherwood's door last Thursday. They're staying there, I take it."

I thanked her and hurried out of the shop. As soon as I reached home, I shut myself into my room, and, without removing my hat and cloak, sat down to think. I should run the risk of meeting them, unprepared, at any moment. I knew too well that any idea of my uncle's admitting them beneath his roof, was hopeless as yet. But I did not think he would forbid me to see my sister. Did he know of her being there? I scarcely thought he could; he had so resolutely set his face against all mention of her name by any one whomsoever. It behoved me to consider how I should act. Could I bear it? Could I see him as my sister's husband? How would they receive me if I went? I revolved all the aspects of the question without coming to any decision, when, on a sudden, my heart cried out: "She is your sister, she is the motherless companion of your infancy, she is the only living being of your blood you have to cling to. Go to her!" I listened to my heart's voice, and arose, and went forth upon the urging of that strong impulse. I hastened out at the iron gates, and took my way along the street to the house the woman had mentioned. Mr. Rotherwood's offices were on the ground floor, and (his dwelling-house being in another part of the town) the upper stories had been hitherto disused. But now, as I glanced at the windows, I saw white curtains there, and signs of habitation. I would not stop for a moment, nor slacken in my pace, lest I should turn coward and go back without fulfilling my purpose. I reached the private door, almost breathless with my speed, and, having knocked, was admitted by a little country servant, who stared at me with all her round eyes.

"Is—your mistress—within?"

Only at the moment of asking the question, did I remember that I must now speak of Anna as Mrs. Horace Lee. With strange unaccountable inconsistency, I, who was coming there to heal the past, and offer reconciliation, could not make that smaller effort of calling my sister by his name!

"Yes," said the girl, with her wondering eyes still fixed upon my face: "she is at home."

"I know her. I am a friend. Let me go up."

I pushed her aside, and ran up the staircase, and into the sitting-room which faced it, and there—nursing a tiny infant at her breast, and

singing softly to it, in the old sweet voice—sat my sister Anna.

"Margaret!"

She rose and faced me. The deep red blood rushed over her face and neck, and then, receding, left her deadly pale.

"O Anna! I did not know this. You are a mother, Anna! O Anna, Anna! let me kiss your child."

With sobs, and half-uttered words, and passionate embraces, we clung together, holding the little baby between us. And so we wept, and wept, until, thank God! the flowing tears washed from my innermost soul, the last lingering bitterness of anger.

When we grew calmer and could speak to each other—that was not for a long time—Anna asked me if Uncle Gough were coming, and if he knew of my visit? But, in her quick way, she read the answer in my face before I could utter it, and drew back with the curved haughty lip I knew so well.

"Ah, no. I see. He is still hard, and implacable, and vindictive. Well, we must endure it. That is all."

"Hush, hush, Anna! Do not speak so; I cannot hear it. Tell me about yourself. How old is your baby? What is its name?"

"Poor little thing! She is very wee and frail, isn't she? Only two months old. We came away from the north, as soon as I was able to travel. She is called Lily."

I remembered Horace having once told me that his mother's name had been Lillias. As I looked more closely at my sister, and as her face recovered itself after the strong emotion of our meeting, I saw that she was thin and worn. She was very lovely, with the rich dark curls clustering round her forehead, and her lustrous brown eyes that looked larger than ever, from the thinness of her face; but her cheek was very pale, and there were lines of care and suffering about her mouth, and the mark on her forehead, which told of the frequent contraction of her handsome brows, had deepened.

"Little lily, poor small lily, little fair white lily, you don't know me; do you? I am Aunt Margaret, and you must be very good to me, and love me very much."

I had taken the infant in my arms, and I hushed it until it fell into a slumber, when Anna told me to place it on a couch in the room that was prepared for it with pillows and a light warm shawl.

"Hark!" cried Anna, as I laid the sleeping baby down; "that is his step. Here is Horace."

I have a confused remembrance of breathing a hurried prayer for strength, while that foot-step mounted the stair; and then his hand was on the lock and he stood before us. Anna advanced to meet him, and put her hands upon his shoulders; but his eye had lighted upon me, where I stood trembling like some guilty creature. Dashing down the papers he carried in his hand, he put his wife aside, and with a cry which I shall never forget, sprang across the room and clasped me in his arms. It was



so sudden, that for a second I was powerless to move. But almost instantly I released myself from his embrace, and, retreating a step or two, held out my hand. I was astonished at my own strength, now that the test had come.

"Forgive me," said Horace, passing his hand over his forehead, "it was so unexpected. I—I did not know what I was doing when I caught sight of your face. Forgive me."

"Forgive you!" cried a voice, so hard and strained, that I started, scarcely knowing it for my sister's. She stood looking at us, and her dark brows were knit, and her eyes flashed menacingly, and I saw what the change was that the year had made in Anna's face. All the youth had gone out of it.

"Forgive you?" she exclaimed. "Do you remember that your wife is present? Has the sight of Margaret so overwhelmed you, as to blot out from your memory the past twelve months?"

Horace dropped my hand and turned towards her.

"No, no, no," he answered, "I have not forgotten, Anna, that you are my wife."

Something in his tone jarred upon her irritable nerves and set her in a flame. The old furious temper took possession of her, and shook her slender figure. She heaped reproaches on us both, until I stood agast to hear her.

"You had best be silent, Margaret," said Horace, turning to me. "She is a mad woman while the fit is on her."

He then sat motionless, with his head bowed upon his hands. Anna's loud angry tones awoke the child, who set up a piteous wail. I stooped to take it in my arms and soothe it; but she snatched it from me, and pressed it to her breast with a fierce clasp.

"She is mine, my child! You shall not touch her! Her love, at least, I can claim." Then, turning to her husband: "You are a weak fool. Do you think I cannot see what old infatuation has come back at the sight of Margaret? You are a weak fool. What was her love to mine? She never loved you. Why, at this moment, see how calm she stands! What did she ever do to prove her love? Would *she* have planned, schemed, defrauded, lied, to win you?"

"Stop, Anna, in Heaven's name!" cried Horace, rising. "Say no more while this mad temper possesses you. Spare us, and spare yourself."

"No; I will not spare myself. I did plan, I did scheme, I did defraud, I did lie. I was false to my sister, to my uncle, to every one. There was nothing I would not have done or risked for you, because I loved you so, and because it seemed as if my great love *must* win yours in the end."

"If neither for my sake nor your own, then for our child's, I beseech you to command yourself," said Horace.

The vehemence of her passion had so exhausted her that she burst into a storm of hysterical sobs, and fell back upon the couch with

the baby wailing and moaning in her arms. Horace went to her, and motioned me away as I advanced:

"Go now, Margaret. You can do no good," he said softly. And indeed Anna's sobs redoubled at my approach, and she shrank away from me. "Go, and try to forget this miserable scene. God ever bless you for coming, Margaret! Don't——" he hesitated, and then went on in a lower voice—"don't quite desert us. We deserve nothing at your hands, but you are not one to balance that bitter truth against our need of you. And—and, for the sake of this innocent little one, don't desert us, Margaret. Don't quite desert us."

I went away from the room and from the house; and, out of the dark sea of sorrow around me, only one thought rose clearly into my mind. That he had loved me, until she turned his heart against me. That he had been deceived. That he had not been coldly false.

For some days after, I hesitated whether or not I should tell my uncle that I had been to see Anna. Had my visit ended peacefully, or given me any hope of happier relations arising between us, I would have risked his short-lived anger, and confessed the truth at once. But I shrank from the idea of a recurrence of such harrowing scenes. I could not tell whether he knew of Horace's return to Willborough; but I thought it almost impossible that he should still be ignorant of it. So the week went by, and I was still undecided. At last I resolved to let Uncle Gough know by indirect means. So I requested Stock to gather some choice wall-fruit, for which the gardens of the Gable House were famous, as I wished to send a present to a friend. The old man brought the fruit wrapped in vine-leaves to the morning-room, where I was sitting, and where Uncle Gough was deep in the perusal of the weekly Gazette from London. Poor Stock was very feeble now, and bent by rheumatism. My aunt's death had been a real grief to the old man, whose few attachments were very strong and lasting.

"I've been an' got what's left on 'em, Miss Margrit. They bain't like they used to be, but the Lord's will be done!"

"Thank you, Stock. They look very fine, I think."

"Ah, look! If looks was all, some on us 'ud stand but a poor chance. Them nectarines—why, I can remember the season afore iver Bill Green set foot in the place, they was one mash o' juiciness. Bustin' they was with ripeness. Seems to me as tho' summat had clean took the flavour out of everythink." Uncle Gough glanced over the newspaper:

"Ay, ay, Stock. I begin to find that out myself. I'm afraid you and I are both suffering from a complaint that is apt to take the flavour out of everything. Old age, Stock, old age. But," he added gently, "it will cure itself, it will cure itself."

"Yes, sure, sir," answered Stock, conveying something like softness into his hard immov-

able face and monotonous voice, in an indescribable way. "Yes, sure; an' the cure 'll be a lastin' an' a blessed un. Once we gits through the valley o' the shadow, there'll be joyful meetin's t'other side. An' no more partin's. That's the blesseddest, sir, bain't it? No more partin's."

"Margaret," said my uncle suddenly, when the old man had withdrawn, and I was packing the fruit in an open basket, "who are those nectarines for?" I trembled, but I had made this opportunity, and would not let it slip. So I took courage to answer in as steady a voice as I could command: "Dear uncle, I hope you will not be angry. I thought I might have them. They are to send to my sister Anna."

He still held the Gazette before him, so that I could not see his face; but I heard the paper rustle and shake in the dead silence that ensued. I was very much frightened. At length my uncle rose from his chair and walked slowly towards the door; but before he reached it, he held out his hand, and I ran into his arms. "God bless thee, my bairn!" he said very softly, and I felt a tear drop on my forehead. His hand was on the lock, but he paused in the act of opening the door, and said, without turning or looking at me: "I'm going into the garden, my lass. There's a vast of fruit and flowers almost spoiling there. Take whatever you want, and do as you like with them. You—you need never tell me anything about it."

In this way, I obtained an indirect permission to send many little gifts from the Gable House to my sister, and they were accepted. It was a long time before I could bring myself to visit her again, but I did so at last, having heard from one of the servants that the child was ailing sadly. After that, I constantly went to see her. I always chose those hours for going, when Horace would probably be absent; and during several months I did not see him half a dozen times. Anna's manner to me fluctuated; but though she was often fretful, irritable, and unreasonable, there was no repetition of the outburst to which she gave way on the occasion of our first meeting. Little Lily was fading and pining, and our anxiety and love for the dear child was a common ground of sympathy between us.

I had had several letters from Madame de Beauguet, giving pleasant accounts of herself and her husband. I had kept her informed, as well as I could, of all that had befallen at the Gable House; of my aunt's death, and of Anna's marriage. My letters, as you may suppose, were but dreary exchanges for her bright cheerful epistles. But she wished for them, and was glad to hear all about myself that I could make up my mind to tell her. I know she was glad to get my letters, because she said so. Anna would often ask to have news of the De Beauguets. Their life in Canada, and the kind of people who surrounded them, seemed to have an inexhaustible interest for her. Gradually I discovered that she was eagerly endeavouring to persuade Horace to leave Eng-

land altogether, and try his fortunes abroad. He was restless and unhappy here, she said. Things were not going well with him. There, in America, he would have a wide field for his talents, and would work with energy. But I believe there was a secret unacknowledged feeling at the bottom of her heart that he would belong to her, more entirely and exclusively, when once he should be divided from the familiar scenes and friends that still claimed any regard from him at home. Be that as it might, Anna had set her heart upon this scheme, and pursued it with headlong vehemence. How Horace thought of it, I could not tell; he never spoke to me on the subject. And, besides, as I have said, we very, very seldom met. But an unforeseen and painful circumstance unexpectedly occurred to make him think seriously of the project. Old Mr. Lee was in the habit of receiving large sums of money for the baronet, his employer, and, Sir Robert being seldom at the Hall, had very nearly absolute control of the property. There was no appeal from Mr. Lee's decision for any tenant on the estate. Notwithstanding an arrogant pomposity of manner, and an implicit belief in the infallibility of his own wisdom, he was considered, on the whole, to deal fairly between landlord and tenant. Even those who most disliked him—I am sorry to say they were rather numerous—had to restrict their animadversions to the offensive "stuck-up-ishness of his manner." "Our old gander" minds me always of Mr. Lee," said Farmer Gibson once. "When he swims under the stone arch of the bridge on the river, he ducks his head down every time, just as though he was high enough and strong enough to carry away bridge and all, if he wasn't precious careful. Now, the arch is a good six foot over him, let him crane his neck up as he will; but the silly bird can't see that. It's just the same with the steward. Why, when he comes into our place, he stoops down, so condescending, for fear he should do us a mischief like. Lord, we're a mile above his head all the time! Only, ye see, he don't know it, no more 'n the gander."

Unfortunately, this blind pride was destined to have a fall which crushed other people in its ruins. I dare say my uncle had heard rumours of the impending crash, in Willborough, before it came. Disaster seldom comes unheralded by a warning atmosphere of its own. But I lived so entirely out of even our little world, that the evil tidings took me quite unprepared. It seems that Mr. Lee, relying solely on his own judgment, and taking no counsel of those whose experience might have guided him, had embarked all he possessed in a ruinous speculation, which burst, leaving him, and many others, nearly penniless. But this was not the worst. The worst was overwhelmingly bad. It was hinted that Mr. Lee had not risked and lost his own, merely. For the error in judgment of losing his own, perhaps more pity than indignation might have been bestowed on him: though, in truth, the world is generally very angry with people who lose their money, and

finds it dreadfully hard to forgive that offence. But it was asserted that a very large sum which Mr. Lee had received for Sir Robert, and which he should have deposited in the county bank, had been appropriated by him to this other purpose—no doubt with the full intention of replacing it—and was lost with his own property in the general ruin. I first heard the news from Anna, who was half distracted about it. "He has disgraced us—disgraced Horace. That is the misery. The loss of his own money would have been a serious misfortune, of course. But this is shame and ruin." I cautioned my sister not to speak in that unguarded way until the truth of the matter should be positively ascertained. But she took this in ill part, asking me if I supposed the good name of her husband's father were not as dear to her as to me? Briefly, she was in no mood to be argued with, and I could only hope that, in her excitement, she had exaggerated the extent of the evil. But on venturing to speak to my uncle of the matter, I learned, to my dismay, that the worst had been confirmed, and that Mr. Lee would not only be a ruined man, but one with a slur upon his name henceforward. "Uncle, what will they do with Mr. Lee? Can Sir Robert punish him? How will it be?" In my anxiety, I forgot the tacit understanding between us that the name of Lee was never more to be mentioned at the Gable House. Uncle Gough forgot it too, perhaps; for he answered with a troubled face, "My lassie, it is a bad business. I am told his son is making every effort to repay the money belonging to Sir Robert; if he can do so, they say it will be hushed up. As to old Lee's own savings, they are blown to the four winds of heaven, like the dust of last summer." This was the calamity which made Horace finally resolve to leave England. He sold his share in Rotherwood's business to young Clinch; and the sum thus raised, together with his savings during the past year, sufficed to replace Sir Robert's money. I believe the baronet behaved considerably, and forbore to take legal proceedings, on the assurance from Horace that his property should be restored. But of course Mr. Lee lost the situation he had filled so many years, and in his old age was cast destitute on the world. When all was done, there remained but a slender store wherewith to take Horace and his wife and child to Canada. He resolved on going first to Quebec, in the hope that De Beauguet—now a prosperous man—might be able to assist him to find employment. It was a sad, sad time. I was with them very much, rendering what assistance I could. Soon after it was settled that they should go, my uncle announced to me one day that he would be absent from Willborough for a week or so.

"I'm going to bide with Norcliffe, Madge," he said. "He has often asked me to go and see him, but I have never had the heart to do it yet. You'll be more at liberty when I am out of the way for a season. I'll be back with you, my darling, on the twentieth."

Horace and my sister were to leave Will-

borough on the nineteenth. Before my uncle started for Beachington, almost at the last moment, he gave me a little packet.

"This," said he, nervously, "is for you, Madge. It is your own, to do as you will with. I put no restriction whatever on the use you are to make of it, but don't let me hear of it any more."

When he was gone, I opened it. It contained a bank-note for fifty pounds. The few days preceding my sister's departure were very busy days, and seemed to fly past us.

On the last evening I was left alone with Horace. Anna had quitted us to put her infant to rest, and we sat in the bare dismantled room, surrounded by the discomfort and desolation which attend the preparations for a long journey, while the evening shadows were deepening rapidly into darkness. Then, for the first time, I learned that old Mr. Lee was to accompany them. "I could not leave my father here, to starve, Margaret," said Horace. "I have no means of providing for him. He must cast in his lot with us. Besides, Willborough scenes and Willborough people are painful to him now. It is best that we should all go and hide our shame and misery together."

"I hope," said I, faltering, "I hope and trust your going may be for the best. There are some here who think that this—this——"

"This disgrace," suggested Horace, bitterly.

"—this misfortune—need not have driven you from England. You, at least, are blameless."

"Am I?" he returned, in a tone that sent a sharp pang to my heart. "Yes, oh yes! I am blameless. Margaret, do you think I could have gone on living this life much longer? It was killing me."

"Horace!"

"Yes, it was killing me, and killing her. We can never know happiness again."

"O, Horace, do not say so!"

"Never, never again. But at least the daily and hourly torture we both endure in this place may be lessened. I am a wretch to distress you, Margaret," he said, rising and going to the window: "a selfish wretch. But the truth is, I am worn out, mind and body, by these last few weeks. I scarcely know what I am doing sometimes."

I saw his hand go wearily up to his head against the dim window-pane.

"I know you are not well," I answered, struggling to regain composure; "I have seen it for some time. The voyage and the change may be of service to you, and to my poor pale Lily. Horace, I have but one other word to say, and I say it with my whole heart—be good to Anna. She loves you; be patient with her; remember she will have but you in all the world now."

"God help her, poor girl!" he answered.

"Yes, Margaret, you may trust me to be patient with her. Who should be patient with her, if not I? We must help each other."

When Anna rejoined us, we sat and talked awhile with some poor assumption of cheerful-

ness. We spoke of our old governess, and of her wedding day, and I sent many messages to her and to her husband. Before I left, I went to look at baby, sleeping in her cot, and slipped into her little tender hand a paper containing my uncle's gift. I had written on it, "To Lily, from Aunt Margaret." But, the following day the little servant brought me a letter, left with her for me by my sister. It contained the bank-note and these words: "If my uncle chooses to recognise me as his niece and adopted daughter, I will cheerfully accept his assistance; but I will take nothing in the shape of alms from you. A. L."

Stubborn, self-tormenting spirit! Poor misguided girl!

### FISH OUT OF WATER.

ALL animals, says the Darwinian theory, spring from an aquatic origin; witness, not merely the wagging of their tails, but the simple presence of a tail itself. When a lion, about to make the fatal spring, lashes his tail, it is only an innate habitual trick, inherited from his great-great-grandmother several millions of times removed—some shark-like scourge of primeval seas.

Take a fish of prey—and very few are not fishes of prey—improve his air-bladder into a lung, stiffen his four fins into legs, finish them off with claws, leave him his scales, or, if you prefer it, either weld them into a pachydermatous hide, or convert them into shaggy fur, with bristling mane and whiskers to match; above all, leave him his tail, which may terminate in a fly-brush or in a sting, and you have at once a land animal, from which, if you met it in a narrow lane, you would probably run away. The Dragon of Wantley was thus generated, perhaps, as well as other monsters slain by heroes.

When an animal has no tail, as apes and others, the proof of its watery birth is none the weaker. It dropped its tail when it came out of the water, as a lady leaves her bathing-dress in the machine. The frog, for instance, when it ceases to be a tadpole, bequeaths its tail to its younger companions. The newt does not: preferring to retain that appendage as an ornament in after-life. It is a mere matter of taste and fashion. The absence of a tail is no guarantee whatever that any creature is not a fish out of water.

Fishes themselves, with almost human perverseness, will get tired of their proper element, and voluntarily put themselves out of water. There are fishes which range the meadows by night, fishes which creep up sluice-gates and rocks, fishes which take leaps worthy of steeple-chasers, fishes which amuse themselves by climbing trees, fishes which take long flights in the air. I say nothing about singing fishes; because, although the singing is unquestionable, the singers have never been caught in the fact.

The dragon-fly is a fish (and a very fierce fish)

out of water, though harmless, nay serviceable, in its flying state, *to us*, whatever complaints flies may make of its conduct. Gnats, again, are fish out of water, who, if they render stagnant pools less offensive to the palate and the nose, have their full revenge afterwards in the bloody fees they exact for their services. The delicate ephemera which charms us with its gauzy wings and golden eyes, is anything but ephemeral as a caddis-worm at the bottom of a ditch or rivulet.

What shall we say of creatures which are at home everywhere, except in the midst of a blazing fire?

You are indulging in a reverie on the brink of the artificial lake which graces your lawn. You are calculating how many gallons of green pea-soup your Mediterranean contains, when past you whistles a shower of *aérolites*. Luckily, they are not bigger than bullets, and not one of them happens to touch you. Curious! They all fall into the pond, and instead of sinking straightway to the bottom, fraternise with friends whom they find already there, and commence swimming and diving with all their might and main. Another party, tired of water-frolics, shoot up suddenly from the surface, and whirl round your head before their departure. A few, more modest, crawl out on the ground, to take their travels amongst the grass.

Was the fair owner of an aquarium never startled—while chanting on her piano by twilight one of Weber's or Beethoven's waltzes, and throwing her whole soul into the tips of her fingers—by the sound of a humming-top floating round the room, ending with the heavy impact of a chilly body on her neck? She might take it, at first, for the eminent and exact Mr. Home, entering by the window, and favouring her with one of his aerial exercises; but she would discover it to be her dear Dytiscus, indulging in an evening flight. To hinder which, the aquarium henceforth must be covered with a muslin net.

Ducks, awks, and penguins, the most oceanic, hide their diminished heads before water-beetles; for these are at once fish out of water, flying things and land things plunged in water, and creepierawlies launched in air. You can neither drown them, nor bury them alive, nor break their necks by throwing them out of window. If you put them on the fire in a frying-pan, they will spread their wings and escape up the chimney. They are invulnerable, except by roasting on a spit, or pounding (and that rapidly) in a mortar.

And so the various modes of existence are intricately dovetailed one into the other, puzzling ordinary observers to say Who is Who, or What is What. If water creatures quit their liquid home, air-breathing animals intrude and take firm possession of it. Whales and porpoises have no legitimate right to establish themselves where they are; they *ought* to be dwellers on dry land.

Seals and morses are inexcusable in their perverse indifference to sound dry land, unless they are victims of an irresistible appetite and an inordinate craving after fish. The manatee—so



like a mermaid that sailors, deprived of female society, have fallen deeply in love with it—still further attests its affinity to landwomen, by having nails that will scratch, at the tips of its fins.

The hippopotamus clearly retires to the bottom of the Nile, in order to avoid being baconised like a pig, drained of its natural juices like a cow, slain for its teeth like an elephant, or made to work for its living like an overgrown donkey. For my own part, I had as lief be called "a hippopotamus" as do the drudgery performed by sundry land animals. The happy hippopotamus bears no mark of metal collar round his neck; and, with the thermometer at 90° Fahr., who would not be he?

The otter, the beaver, and the water-rat, are merely to be considered as amateurs with a strong hankering after aquatics, and a full acquiescence in abstinence from flesh. They are really landmen, though fond of bathing; they are hereditary proprietors of residences on the banks of streams. They are fresh-water sailors at heart, even though a marine villa may be their temporary home.

If land animals be a party of swimmers who have finally left the waves for the shore, plants are not unlikely to have adopted a similar change of habitation. We can conceive the earth entirely covered with an ocean teeming with fish and tangled with seaweed. Such plants would have their mass continually submerged, never indulging in an air-bath. They would be more permanently confined to water than, probably, many of the fish themselves, which in all ages have delighted to float, and to bask in the sun and leap into the air. The first-born plants would be, perforce, necessarily and completely aquatic; thoroughly fish-plants.

But now that dry land *has* appeared and the phenomena of the tides are visibly manifest—now that twice in every twenty-four hours a portion of the ocean's bed lies bare and dry—we know that certain seaweeds can not only be fish out of water for a time, but support treatment of the roughest kind. Throughout the world, the strip of shore, which lies between high and low-water mark, is tenanted by plants which, when not covered by the sea, are baked in sunshine, burnt by frost, torn by hurricanes, and deluged by sheets of fresh water, enough to reduce them to cinder or pap, and to wash the life-salt out of their frame. A brave old plant, most certainly, is the famous ivy green of the song; but a braver is the bladder fucus, enduring what it does as a fish out of water. It discovers land, takes possession of it, and holds its own in spite of all resistance.

Many plants, too, which you would believe confined to the marsh, are nevertheless members of an Alpine club. You left them on the sea-level, and they welcome you on cloud-capped heights. The pretty *parnassia* imbibes mist with its leaves, as kindly as it sucks in wet with its roots. Others, like the golden-flowered moneywort (which makes such a pretty fringe

to a balcony), settle indifferently on the skirts of a swamp, or on the crumbling brink of a gravelly upland.

An able cultivator of palm-trees has let out the secret that, when they fail in our hothouses, it is mostly because of a stint of water. But the very love of many land plants for water and its neighbourhood, shows that plants, though thirsty souls in general, may be still made to put up with a certain amount of thirstiness. As *Venus* is said (in poetry) to linger near her native sea, so there are plants which, although they *live* inland, never thrive so well as within an easy distance from the shore. The list is long; the numbers which have *maritimus*, *a*, *um*, for their specific name, constitute only a few. To us, insular observers, the fact does not present itself so strikingly, because the whole United Kingdom is more or less maritime, compared with continental areas.

The cork-tree, the fig-tree, the tree-mallow, the cocoa-nut-tree, asparagus, sea-kale, cabbages, many *mesembryanthemums*, and a host of others, thoroughly enjoy being fanned by sea breezes. The mangrove even enjoys a salt-water foot-bath so much as to be answerable for the stories about cockles and oysters growing upon trees. "At *Sierra Leonna*," says *The Wonders of Nature*, "there is the oyster-tree, which has no other fruit but oysters. It has a very broad leaf, almost as thick as leather. The boughs hang down a good way into the water, and are overflowed by the tide. On the mud and slush that stick to them, the young oysters bred there fasten, and that in such vast numbers that one can hardly see anything almost, but long ropes of oysters."

The study of fish out of water has its interest, though we may never hope to see flocks of carp and tench straggling over our lawns. Lakes and streams give birth to many organisms which are not included in ichthyology proper; and the question what aquatic vegetables we can persuade to live and thrive out of water, is important not merely in a decorative, but in an utilitarian point of view. If celery has been induced to desert its native ditch and grow fat and fine in our kitchen-gardens, there is no reason why other good things should not follow its example. A recent *Gardener's Chronicle* says: "A supply of watercresses for autumn and winter may be easily obtained by planting some strong young tops, about four inches long, in a line at the foot of a north wall. The cuttings should be of pieces which have roots protruding from the joints. Watercresses will grow freely in such a situation. And where there are no artificial beds, and natural ones are a considerable distance off, these will be found useful."

There are water-flowers which take pattern by the watercress, presenting themselves and their foliage independent of floods. One of my rambling grounds is a large tract of marshes abounding in vegetable and animal life. There are deep pools, shallow ditches, banks of mud

uncovered by water, and dry ground tilled by the spade and the plough. In all these sites, except the latter, the white water-lily is abundant. In the pools, it sends up long leaf and flower stalks; in the shallower places, proportionally shorter ones; on the muddy patches, with *no* water over them, it assumes the habit of a herbaceous plant, which only requires judicious treatment to make magnificent "bedding stuff." Here is a fish out of water worth catching, and it will be strange if somebody do not take the hint. Our gardeners are perfectly competent to carry it out.

### BUSILY ENGAGED.

"It must be done, Dick, my boy," said my uncle, mournfully, as he filled his glass, and pushed the claret to me. "Come, now, make up your mind; off with you to-morrow, and success attend you."

"My dear uncle, once more let me——"

"My dear nephew, you have done it so often that repetition is useless. I am not a harsh relative, or I should simply say, 'Dick, go and be married;' or, as my theatrical prototype—especially if wealthy—was wont to express himself, 'Don't talk to *me*, young sir. Off, puppy, and be married, or never see my face again.' No, my dear Dick, I belong to a race of civilised uncles, and I confine myself to a line of argument which ought to weigh more with you than any commands of mine. It was the desire of your good father that you should marry before you were twenty-six."

"But I am *not* twenty-six, and——"

"You will be in a month," returned my uncle, with wonderful recollection. "Why, there's not a day to lose."

"Well, but, my dear sir——" I began, with some consternation.

"I'll cut this matter short," said my uncle. "You remember what the great Duke said to that other strong-handed veteran—when India was in sore need—'*You or I*.'"

"Perfectly. By-the-by, now, what do you think, sir, would have been the result, supposing Napier——"

"We will pursue that branch of the subject on a future occasion," said Sir Richard, dryly. "In the mean time, go where love, if not glory, waits you, together with, I should imagine, about eight thousand pounds."

"It appears, then, that my wife is already found."

"Found, yes. Selected, no," said my uncle.

"There is more than one candidate for my affections?"

"There are—let me see," said my uncle, calculating, "nine."

"Nine?"

"My old friend and college-chum, Bob Crowdie," said Sir Richard Purkiss, "has nine daughters. One—a sweet, charming girl—is unhappily deformed. Out of the remainder, Crowdie is anxious—and so am I—that you

should select the partner of your life, and, my dear boy, since I have never known you express anything but an indifference, almost amounting to contempt, for the entire sex, I trust you will the more readily fall into our views."

"I know so little of these good people——"

"Don't call them 'good people,' sir, as if they were fishwives," said my uncle, a little warmly. "If you don't know them better, the fault's your own. They like *you*, Dick. Come, I may say that—and—and—I fear I am telling tales; but I am by no means sure that you have not (unintentionally, of course) somewhat compromised the peace of mind of Miss——of *one* of them, already."

"I am glad it's only *one*," I said, laughing. "But are you serious? If so, you should at least tell me frankly to which of these young ladies you refer."

"There, you must excuse me. That I cannot do," said my uncle, mysteriously. "No. Were I to indicate Miss Crowdie, I might be doing an injustice to Miss Sophia, or, by pointing, however indirectly, to Miss Lucy, I might divert your ideas from my pretty Mattie, whose claim, without prejudice to Ethel, might only be exceeded by my little Laura Jane. In short——"

"Enough. Let the doubt remain. It gives a mysterious charm to the expedition. But there is still a difficulty."

"I see none," said my uncle, impatiently.

"Supposing, among so many, I should find it impossible to make my selection?"

"Oh, is *that* all?" said Sir Richard, much relieved. "I think that obstacle might be easily overcome. Let Crowdie choose. He is the best judge of his own children. Yes; I am clear you could not do better than refer it entirely to him. And I think I can promise you, Dick," added my uncle, cheerfully, "that he has already made up his mind."

"I am sure he is very kind," said I. "But, uncle, *to-morrow*?"

"As I have already observed," returned Sir Richard, "*you or I*. My brother's earnest desire was that there should be a direct heir in our family, and he named twenty-six as the latest age to which he could wish your marriage deferred. You have neglected to make your choice, and hang me if I think you ever will. Now, mark me, if you don't, I *shall*. I am told men do marry at sixty—generally some chit of eighteen—and I know a pretty little thing of the sort (she's at school, not a hundred miles hence), whom, as your aunt, you could not fail to revere. As for my testamentary intentions, Dick, I have never made a mystery of them. You are my heir. But, if I marry, my wife and my children will take away the bulk of the fortune I would fain have had descend upon you. Come, Dick, set me free from this responsibility. Go and visit these good friends to-morrow, and let your first letter announce to me that you are engaged."

The kind old man extended his hand. I

pressed it in acquiescence, and the next day departed for the residence of Mr. Crowdie.

Not being quite certain whether my uncle had prepared the family for my visit, I thought it expedient to give it the appearance of a morning call, and accordingly, leaving my luggage at the village inn, I strolled up to the mansion. The whole family were in the garden, and thither I proceeded.

The party assembled on the lawn was of appalling dimensions. About eighteen young ladies and one young man were engaged at croquet; while Mr. and Mrs. Crowdie, with Alice the deformed reclining on a chair couch, looked on. Six of the players eliminated themselves from the company, and came to greet me.

"Now comes the question," thought I, "of which of these fair-checked maidens have my dangerous attractions and assiduous attentions proved the bane?"

Miss Mattie, with the brown frank eyes, was quicker than the rest, and gave me her hand.

"It isn't *you*," I thought, and dismissed her gently back to her game.

Miss Crowdie followed, laughing gaily. She had a wide but handsome mouth, and pearl-white teeth.

"Nor *you*," I thought.

"Just in time, Mr. Purkiss," cried Miss Laura Jane, shyly offering me a mallet.

"Doubtful—ha!" was my reflection.

Miss Sophy gave me neither hand nor word, but just lifted eyes of the colour of a forget-me-not, and dropped them again, while a slight but rich blush passed over her smooth cheek.

"*Aha!*" I whispered to myself.

Mr. and Mrs. Crowdie now joined the group. The lady was quiet and reserved, and wore a sort of astonished look, which was said to have been not always habitual with her, but had increased with the advent of each successive daughter, until the birth of Laura Jane placed her in a condition of permanent amazement, to which no language was apparently adequate; for she never spoke, except in answer, or in faint disclaimer of the replies and observations perpetually attributed to her by her facetious husband. The latter was a bluff, plain-spoken man, so plain, indeed, that to mistake him for vulgar would have been a pardonable error, had he not prided himself upon that very bluntness, esteeming it an essential characteristic of the good old country squire.

"Ha, ha, ha!" was his greeting, with a poke in the ribs, which I cleverly dodged. "Here you find us at our daily sports, and precious finikin stuff it is. No bowls, or leap-frog, or single-stick now. Croquet, sir, croquet is the game. It's imbecile in principle, and absurd in practice. It tends, I am told, to softening of the brain, but, by a wise provision of nature, those most devoted to the game appear to be endowed with a less proportion of the organ."

"What I see before me somewhat contradicts your theory, sir," I said.

"Oh, my daughters are no fools. I don't

mean that. They play because they have good ankles. Mrs. Crowdie often tells me she never saw a string of wenches with cleaner pasterns."

"Oh, Philip!" said Mrs. Crowdie, "how *can* you?"

"And how is my good old friend, hey?" continued Mr. Crowdie, putting his hands behind him, and looking as burly as he possibly could. "Not married yet? Faith, I expect to hear it every day. As Mrs. Crowdie observed to me, he's just the jolly old boy to do it!"

"Oh, Philip, really——" protested Mrs. Crowdie.

"Come, Dick the younger, if I may call you so, for hang me if your uncle doesn't look as young as you, go and take a club or mallet, or whatever they call it, with those impatient hussies, and, when you want to be refreshed with rational conversation, come back, as my wife always says, to *us*."

"Oh, Philip!"

"Stop one moment. Here's a girl of mine you have hardly ever seen. Mr. Purkiss, my darling," he added, tenderly leaning over her.

Alice raised herself a little, and smiled. Such a smile—soft, bright, saint-like—as if rather yielding than seeking pity. I bowed, mechanically, lower than my wont, and, next minute, found myself absorbed in the imbecilities of croquet.

The game, as it chanced, came to a premature end—if, to such a sport, such an end be possible—those ladies not belonging to the house having to seek their respective homes. The rest dispersing in different directions, it so happened that I was left alone with the pretty Sophy. I was really astonished at this girl's beauty. Why had I never noticed it before? Her sweet yet timid manner perfectly captivated me. I was angry when the dressing-bell announced that we must part.

To my great surprise, I found a room prepared for me, and my portmanteau—surreptitiously sent for from the inn—unpacked. This was a good sign. I hurried my dressing, thinking all the time of Sophy's eyes. A change was coming over me. I had always abhorred the thought of marriage. Now the prospect gave me a thrill of delight.

"Sir Hugh," said my host to the dull young man, who had been playing croquet all day, and looked as if he had done nothing else all his life, "take Miss Crowdie. Richard, bring Sophy. My wife and I always trudge in together, like Punch and Judy."

(There was a tradition in the family that by this, his favourite expression, Mr. Crowdie meant Darby and Joan.)

I saw more of Sophy's long lashes that day than of my own plate. To my great surprise, I was actually falling in love with the girl, and that at express speed. Dinner passed away like a dream, and the chair beside me was vacant. The cheery voice of my host aroused me:

"Come up here, my dear fellow. Hugh—Sir Hugh Sagramore—had to leave us, as they have a party at home."

I saw we were alone.

"Hark ye, my dear Purkiss!" continued my host. "I'm going to speak to you like a bluff old fellow as I am. Fathers have sharpish eyes. I observed your manner to-day, and I think I can make a shrewd guess what has given us the pleasure of your company. You know my plain way, and will pardon me if I anticipate what should certainly have been allowed to come from you. You are interested in my little Soph?"

"My dear sir," I answered, promptly, "I am greatly indebted to you for your correct estimate of my feelings. I am, indeed—to adopt your own expression—interested in Miss Sophia, and, with permission of those to whom she is so deservedly dear, I—"

"Dick, my boy, say not another word"—my kind (future) parent-in-law grasped my hand—"win her. Take her. She is yours. I give my girls each their eight thousand—interest for my life—principal after. So much for that. You will inform your uncle to-morrow?"

"Certainly, my dear sir. But—ahem!—the—young lady—"

"Psha! I forgot that," said my impulsive host. "Well, I think you may be pretty sure. Still, as you say, it might be as well—just excuse me a moment." And he bustled out of the room.

I had hardly collected my ideas when he was back again.

"All right. Some more wine? No? Well, then, just go and see how you like our new orchids in the conservatory. There's the door."

I went in. It was growing dusk, but I could detect a fairy form moving among the shrubs. I followed it, and gently took the little pendent hand. It was not withdrawn. What I said, I certainly shall not write. Let everybody propose for himself. The murmurs that responded to mine were eminently satisfactory. My happiness was only equalled by my astonishment at the whole matter. Both were profound.

A little difficulty now arose. It behoved me to plead for an early day for our union. I had been so slightly acquainted with the family, that I had positively never exchanged a dozen words with this beloved of my soul. It might be almost said, I had not known her at all till within these three hours. How, then, can I fitly introduce the subject of my intense impatience? Shall I leave it to my plain-spoken papa-in-law? No. Here goes.

"And now, dearest Sophy (ah, that sweet name)!"

"Sweet enough, but it's not *mine*," retorted my affianced lady.

"N-not—yours!" I stammered, a strange misgiving stealing over me.

"Certainly not," was the reply; and, as she turned to the light, I beheld the face of Miss Crowdie.

"I—I—eh—why, what is this?" said I.

The young lady burst into tears, and hid her face in her hands.

"Mamma t-told me—you w-w-wished to speak to me," she sobbed.

I hate to see a woman weep. And *she* wept so prettily!

"My dear Miss Crowdie——"

"C-call me Su-hu-san."

"Well, Susan dear, let me wipe off that falling—!" I was gliding into the old song, and also, strange as it may seem, into a degree of interest for the fair weeper hardly compatible with my previous engagements.

I scarcely know how it chanced that one of her pretty brown silken curls had got entangled on my button. While engaged in disentangling it, and murmuring words of comfort more or less coherent, Mr. Crowdie's broad face appeared at the window. To my surprise, he merely laughed merrily—adding:

"Dick, I want you. Come here a moment."

Miss Crowdie vanished, and I, leaping out at the window, joined my host.

"Dick," he said, taking my arm, "here has been a little mistake. My wife, I must tell you, has one persistent fancy. It is her fixed idea that if the eldest of a family of girls does not marry *first*, the matches of the rest will be unlucky. With a decision, for which I certainly should not have given her credit, she sent Susan in Sophy's place; and—eh—do you mind much? She's good as gold—my Susy. Come, what d'ye say?"

"But, my dear friend, Miss Sophia——"

"Oh! I'll make *that* all right. Thanks, my dear boy, you have made us very happy." And he hurried off.

"Mr. Purkiss, Mr. Purkiss, we are going for a moonlight row on the lake," cried a silver voice from an upper casement, and presently down came a bevy of damsels, in the centre of whom I recognised my present betrothed, Miss Crowdie, walking with the timid assurance of a bride, and looking, in the moonlight, I must confess, fair and graceful as Diana's self. It seemed to be an understood thing that I was to give her my arm; and thus it came to pass that, in the walk down to the lake, we were left together, an arrangement to which (I noticed with some relief) Miss Sophia's exertions greatly contributed.

They were really a charming family, on the best terms with themselves, each other, and all around them. We had a very merry row, and were in the midst of an Italian barcarole, when Mr. Crowdie's jovial voice hailed us from the landing-place.

"Let's put in *here*," said one of the party, pointing to a bank, on which we could see glow-worms sparkling.

As we neared the spot, several of the party rose at once. The boat gave a sudden lurch—there was a shriek—a plunge—a gurgle—Miss Laura Jane had toppled overboard, and gone down into the deepest part of the lake! I tore off my coat, and plunged after, catching her, I imagine, as she rose to the surface, and bore her safely to the bank. The poor child, though much frightened, did not seem materially injured by the shock. She was put carefully to bed, and all seemed going well, when, somewhat



later, the housekeeper beckoned Mrs. Crowdie out of the room.

A little after, Mr. Crowdie received a similar summons, and it became known that Laura Jane was not in a satisfactory state. She had become feverish and delirious, talking wildly of the accident, and of her rescue.

Mr. Crowdie came down with an anxious look on his broad visage.

"We think, Purkiss, that she wants to see you."

"Me, my dear sir?"

"Yes. Would you mind stepping up? My wife will be greatly obliged to you."

In a minute or two, I was beside the poor girl's couch; her mother and the nurse standing opposite, her father at the foot. Her cheek was flushed, and her eyes, bright and restless with fever, rolled eagerly from face to face, till they dwelt on mine. Then a sudden change came over her. She became calm, stretched out her little hand to me, and, closing her eyes, seemed as if she would sleep, still keeping my fingers prisoner.

"Who shall sit up with her, my dear?" asked Mr. Crowdie. "Stop! Her lips move. She knows us. She's trying to speak. Ask her, Dick, who shall sit by her?"

I repeated the question.

"You," was the embarrassing reply. And the little patient sank into a refreshing sleep.

As soon as I was able to release my hand, without risk of disturbing her, my mother supplied my place, and I returned to the drawing-room. All the fair company, however, even my newly-affianced Susan, had disappeared. But I was not long left alone. Mr. Crowdie soon rejoined me. His manner was embarrassed.

"Purkiss, he said, 'the child whose life you saved is very dear to me. Ahem! You do not desire to embitter the existence you have preserved?'"

I emphatically disclaimed any such intention.

"Then listen to me, Dick," resumed Mr. Crowdie. "My wife and I have arrived at the conclusion that your noble act has left an impression upon our dear girl's mind stronger than mere gratitude—to be effaced only with life."

"My good sir," I gasped.

"One moment. You are about to refer to Susan. Banish that anxiety. She is a sensible, affectionate girl, and has (I may as well mention) already assured us that no claim, no predilection of her own, shall—You understand. Permit us to welcome your alliance as the husband of my Laura Jane, and our happiness is complete."

What could I say? My affections were manifestly regarded as transferable, and they were transferred on the spot. I had the pleasure that very night of shaking hands with Mrs. Crowdie as the betrothed of Laura Jane!

"Humph!" I thought, as I lay down rather tired, "three engagements in one day will satisfy my uncle that I have not been idle!"

I was up with that bird which is erroneously supposed to be the earliest of fowls, because he

makes most disturbance about it, and enjoyed a glorious plunge in the limpid lake. On my way back from the bathing-house, towel in hand, I encountered Miss Adelaide. She was, I think, the third daughter, and reputed, by many, the beauty of the family, having a small classic head, regular features, and large dark eyes, into which there came, at intervals, a peculiar gleam. Like her mother, she was reserved. I hastened to greet her, and then eagerly added, "And now, pray tell me of our dear invalid? She has rested well, I hope?"

"She has rested well. And 'dear' she is, indeed, Mr. Purkiss, to all our hearts."

"You need not tell me that," I replied significantly. "I can only say that, if the most devoted—"

"But——"

"The most unalterable attachment——"

"Stop, I beg of you!" cried my companion.

"Oh, my dear Mr. Purkiss, I have something to—to explain. There's a mistake."

"No—really? Another?" I muttered.

"You noticed that my dear sister clasped your hand." (I bowed gravely.) "And, when invited to say who should watch beside her, what did she reply?"

"You—meaning me."

"So my father thought also, dear friend. But the sound deceived you both. She said, 'Hugh, —not 'you'—and— and forgive me, she meant Sir Hugh Sagamore, to whom, it appears, the warm-hearted child has become attached."

"The sound is *not* dissimilar," I owned—a little disconcerted. "Still——"

"If you knew how sorry I am to tell you this," said the pretty Adelaide, laying her fingers on my arm. (They were white, and beautifully carved at the taper points.) "Dear Mr. Purkiss, take comfort."

"I shall endeavour to do so," I replied, in a hollow voice. "It is a blow."

"There is a balm for every wound," said Miss Adelaide, gently.

"But what kind hand shall administer it?" I asked.

The large lustrous eyes turned upon me for a moment, and were as suddenly averted. My companion was silent. She was drawing something on the gravel-terrace with her parasol, and, to my eye, it took the form of a human heart, with a perforation in the larger valve. I accepted the omen.

"Miss Crowdie—Adelaide!——"

She gave a little start.

"Can I, dare I, hope that *you*, who knew so well how to alleviate the pain of this announcement, will enable me to forget it altogether?"

As I believe I have hinted before, such dialogues are confidential. I shall merely remark, that Adelaide and I returned to the house together, and that I whispered to my sweet companion, as we entered the breakfast-parlour,

"I shall beg an audience of papa after breakfast!"

The bluff squire saved me the trouble, how-

ever, by inviting me to come and inspect a remarkable pig.

"By jingo, as my wife says," he added. "I never feel that I've done my morning's duty till I've been the round of sty and stable!"

On the way I broached the subject nearest my heart. No sooner had I mentioned the name of "Adelaide," than my host's gratified smile gave place to an almost shocked expression. He sat down upon a railing, took off his broad-leaved hat, and fanned his agitated face.

"Purkiss," he said, "were you aware—did not your uncle ever refer to—ch—my poor Ady? Don't you *know*?"

"Know?—know *what*?"

"Dick, have you never observed a singular, an almost wild, glitter in that girl's eyes?"

I assented.

"It indicates, when frequent, an accession of a peculiar form of insanity, called 'kleptomania.' Have you your purse about you?"

"Purse, my dear sir! Of course—Yet, no. Why, bless me, I am sure I put it in my pocket."

"And she took it out," remarked Mr. Crowdie, mournfully. "No matter. It will be restored, with everything else she may lay hands on, in the course of the day. No, my dear boy, *here* the unhappy child is safe—harmless—understood. But she must never leave our roof. Console yourself. My wife shall talk with her, and make all square. Yet, hark ye, I cannot give up the hope of calling you my son, because our plans haven't gone smooth. Dick, I offer you the prize lamb of my flock—my little Lucy. Just you come and look at her; chat with her if you like, and if you don't lose your heart in ten minutes—"

Lucy was engaged with a class of little rustics, and being unable, for the present, to come out and be engaged to *me*, we went in and joined the class.

Lucy was correcting on the slates what she had been previously dictating.

"Ireland is famous for Peter Turf." Pray, Peter Burberry, who is 'Peter Turf?'" asked Lucy.

"Please, teacher, you said Peter Turf!" retorted Master Burberry, forcing a brown knuckle into his eye.

"True," said the young lady, smiling. "So I did. But, the next time, suppose you spell his name 'peat, or turf.'"

Mr. Burberry executed a backward kick—meant to represent a bow—from which my shins narrowly escaped, and the lesson closed.

"Look, you young ones," said the bluff squire, "I've got to take a sweep round the plantations. Get you home together, and order lunch exactly at half-past one. Off you go!"

Miss Lucy was rather shorter than her sisters, and possessed a perfect cloud of rich golden hair. Her manner was particularly frank and sweet, and she had a sense of humour which spoke intelligibly in her laughing blue eye.

"Papa is so funny!" she said, as we walked towards the house. "Do you know what he

expected? Ha! ha! Then I won't tell you. Come in."

A sudden resolution seized me.

"I *do* know what he expected, my dear young lady," I said, firmly; "and, so far as it rests with me, he certainly shall not be disappointed. You look disturbed. I entreat you to hear me. I was about to speak, when—in short, you were to have become my sister. Oh, let me have the joy of bestowing upon you a far more precious title. Be my wife!"

We forgot the lunch altogether.

When Mr. Crowdie returned, we were still lingering under the trees. He walked up straight to us, looked in Lucy's blushing face, and, placing our hands together, simply remarked:

"At last. My best hopes are realised."

My Lucy, a little agitated with all that had happened, was dismissed to lie down for an hour, while I, who had been affianced a good deal more, felt also that a little quiet meditation would restore the tone of my nerves. I accordingly sought out a little moss-covered seat, of which I knew, and there fell into a train of thought, which—owing, I take it, to the lulling whisper of the trees—ended in slumber.

Merry voices aroused me. The party had commenced croquet. Half fearing that Lucy would miss me, I hastened to the lawn. She was not there. Smothering my disappointment, I accepted a mallet and a partner—Mattie—and was soon hard at work. In one of the innumerable disgusting pauses of the game, I asked where was Lucy?

"Lucy!" exclaimed Mattie, opening her brown eyes to their widest. "Don't you know? She's gone."

"God bless me! Gone?—gone whither?"

"To Aunt Mompesson's. For two months."

"But, I—I—surely—"

"We sent to look for you, my dear Mr. Purkiss," said Mrs. Crowdie, who had quietly approached, "but the messenger found you so comfortably asleep, that he would not disturb you. We make a practice of never contradicting Mrs. Mompesson. She *would* run off with Lucy—so there's an end."

"But, your daughter—did she—didn't she—"

"She would have liked to say good-bye, but my aunt would wait no longer, and Lucy begged me to say that, if she might suggest, all that passed this morning might as well be considered as forming part of the dreams in which she heard you were indulging in the arbour. But here's Crowdie, who can tell you more."

My host bustled up, and took me by both hands, saying, with much feeling,

"Purkiss, my good friend, I am at a loss to express the sense I feel of your flattering and most persevering efforts to ally yourself with my family. Believe me, I shall never forget them. But courage, my dear boy. I have four girls yet; and if, among these—"

"The fact is," I answered, with a smile, "some fatality seems to attend upon any exercise of choice on my part. All your children are charming. If it were not wholly out of the question to submit such young ladies to such an arbitrament, I would almost venture to propose that those who deem a prize, like myself, worth the pains, should—ahem!—forgive me—draw lots for it."

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared the squire. "A capital idea! But they needn't *know* it, eh? Wife 'll write their names—that is, Mattie, Ethel, and Leonora—my poor Alice is out of the race—and we'll decide it where we stand."

Absurd as was the plan—for I had only meant it in pleasantry—Mr. Crowdie insisted on nailing me to my own suggestion. The names were written, the lots drawn by Mr. Crowdie himself, and Mattie was the winner.

"My dear Dick, I congratulate you!" and he caught my hand. "Believe me, you have been most fortunate."

I glanced at the unconscious Mattie, who, deserted by me, was battling away at croquet on behalf of both, and wondered what was next to be done.

"Will you"—said Mr. Crowdie—"ahem!—or—shall I?"

"You, by all means, my dear sir," said I. And while I strolled with Mrs. Crowdie among her azaleas, I saw him detach Mattie from the game. Presently, and quite unexpectedly, we met them at the turn of a path. Mattie's brown eyes were a little wider open than usual, but she was apparently resigned to her lot.

"Here, Dick," said Mr. Crowdie, "I give you the light of my house. And, let me tell you, it is not every one who should win her from us so easily."

I felt that I had no right to complain. Nothing could well exceed the simplicity of the process by which I *had* "won" her.

The tête-à-tête, which shortly followed, was not a prolonged one. It was, however, long enough to convince me that my new betrothed was likely to prove a pleasing, gentle wife; and it was with the sort of relief one feels in sitting down, after a hot and weary journey, under fresh green trees, that I accepted this new fortune. Making my way to the quiet deserted drawing-room, I resolved to write at once to my uncle.

I thought it just as well to say nothing of previous disappointments. It was best he should suppose that, after careful observation, I had selected Mattie as the most eligible wife, and niece-in-law of the whole party. As I wrote, I began to think she *was*, and had commenced an almost lover-like description—"My Mattie is"—when the door softly opened, and Ethel Crowdie, a little sylph-like thing, with violet eyes and large brown eyebrows that met, stole into the room. She had a rose in her hand, which, as she approached me, she picked to pieces in an embarrassed manner.

"Mr. Purkiss—oh, Mr. Purkiss!—I want to—tell you a secret."

My mind misgave me. The pen dropped from my hand.

"A secret, Miss Ethel? *Me?*"

"Yes, you, dear Mr. Purkiss, for no one else can help us; and oh, you are so good natured! Mattie told me of your engagement, and asked me to break it to him; but, oh! I couldn't. It would kill him!"

"Kill *him*? Whom? Pray explain."

"Mr. Lowry, the curate. Such a good creature; but shy. Mattie never knew how much he loved her, but I did; and now—oh, Mr. Purkiss! you haven't seen much of Mattie—couldn't you, if you tried very much, like somebody else instead?"

"Answer me one question first. Did your sister authorise this appeal?"

She inclined her head.

"Enough," said I, calmly. "I not only resign my claim, but, if I can in any manner forward the views of my fortunate rival, pray command me."

"Oh, how good you are! Thanks—a thousand thanks. But it will be difficult. Papa likes you so very much."

Flattery is at all times sweet, but when it proceeds from a beautiful mouth, accompanied by a bewitching smile, who can resist?

"Perhaps," I said, "some—ahem!—device might be hit upon, that might at once meet your sister's views, and preserve to papa the connexion he is so good as to desire. Do you, my dear young lady, see what I mean?" (The damsel hung her head till I saw the white parting quite to the back.) "I see you do. Ethel, for your sister's sake . . . what say you, dear one?"

A few minutes later, I finished the letter to my uncle. It was not difficult. I carefully erased "Mattie," and substituted "Ethel."

I had little difficulty with the worthy squire. So long as he secured me (he was pleased to say) for one of his dear girls—he was comparatively indifferent which—and I saw that Mr. Lowry's suit was gained.

All now seemed smooth and happy. My intended father-in-law was yet expatiating on the peculiar fitness of the choice I had eventually made, when his wife entered the room hastily, with a letter in her hand.

"Mr. Crowdie—Philip!—I must speak to you directly."

I made a movement to withdraw.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Purkiss—I did not see you. Pray remain," said the lady; "this concerns you."

"Upon my word this is most singular!" ejaculated Mr. Crowdie, after glancing over the epistle. "It would hardly be believed! Purkiss, I scarcely know how to tell you. Spifflicate me (as my wife frequently observes)"—"Oh, *Philip*!" said the lady—"if here is not *another* spoke in our wheel! Mrs. Mompesson, whom we never contradict, writes me here, in confidence, that, seeing a young stranger (yourself, Dick) here, and not knowing what his intentions might be, she had stopped, on the road,

to send me this intimation that she had promised her influence with me in reference to Ethel—who is her great favourite—on behalf of Sir Edward Tottenham, who has been eagerly desiring to improve the acquaintance he made with her at the county ball. Now, my dear Dick, to offend Mrs. Mompesson is——”

“Just so, my dear sir. It must not be. To say the truth, until you fairly presented one of your fair daughters to me at the altar, I should not regard my happiness as secured.”

“Oh, Dick, this must not end *so*!” said the squire, with genuine regret and feeling. “After all, there’s Leonora.”

“The eighth attempt, sir, may be more prosperous,” I replied, rather bitterly; “let it be so. Do with me as you please. My affections have been so perpetually nipped, that I don’t think they ought to be expected to bud again without some assurance that they will be allowed to blow.”

“Come, that is but fair,” said the squire. “Hark ye, Dick. My Leonora has no will, no fancy, except what is mine. Will you take *that* assurance? She is a dear good girl, and, though she is at this moment out for a walk, you may—yes, I am *sure* you may—consider yourself as engaged.”

I bowed, and remembered, with some satisfaction, that my letter to my uncle was not yet gone. Of the fair Leonora I knew little—had never, in point of fact, addressed a single observation to that young lady. But I felt sure that I should like her. I had remarked the beautiful acquiescent disposition of these young people. Moreover, the selection had assumed that character which has immortalised the late Mr. Hobson—Leonora, or nothing. We shook hands (as before), and, subject to the young lady’s approval, the matter was arranged.

Mr. Crowdie was still speaking, when Alice, the invalid, was wheeled into the room. Her father’s voice and manner always, I had noticed, underwent a softening change in the presence of this his favourite child. Kissing her tenderly, he intimated to her the connexion I was about to form with the family, and then, leaving us together, hurried away with his wife to meet Leonora.

I glanced at my companion. The pure and spiritual beauty of her face was marred by an expression of pain.

“I fear you are suffering,” I said.

“In mind, yes,” said Alice, “but not in body. I am, in reality—Heaven be praised for it!—much better.”

“Indeed. Believe me, I rejoice to hear that there is a possib——”

“I see,” replied Alice, with her bright angelic smile, “that you partake the impression that has gone abroad—that I am deformed. It is not so. Patience and a change of climate are all—so says my doctor—that I need, to regain a certain, if not robust, health. “But it is not of *this* I wish to speak,” she added, hastily. “Oh, Mr. Purkiss, what are you about

to do? Is the human heart a toy, to be passed from hand to hand—given, retaken, crushed perhaps at last—without one compassionate scruple for the treasures of true and abiding love that might have flourished there? I have seen all that has passed. You have a kind, easy—perhaps susceptible, nature. The deference we girls have been accustomed to pay to our parents’ wishes, and our fond attachment to each other, have co-operated with this, and led to much of what has occurred. You have scarcely seen Leonora, never spoken to her. In spite of a cold temperament, she is a good, sweet girl, and you may doubtless win her; but to do so in a manner that would satisfy a generous, kindly nature, will require more time, and a far more delicate procedure, than you seem to consider needful.”

“I accept the censure,” said I, feeling rather ashamed. “I have but to say, in extenuation, that, having lived up to this advanced period of my life, perfectly fancy-free—a fact which somewhat negatives my ‘susceptibility’—I found myself surrounded by so many charms at once, that my judgment became bewildered, and proved unequal to the situation. Now, I see clearly. Ah, that I had had such a monitor before.”

“Nay, it is not too late,” she began, eagerly.

“I know it is not too late; for Leonora, I recal my absurd pretensions. They would be little short of insult. But, oh, in opening my eyes, you have shown me too much for my own peace.”

“What do you mean?”

“Had I known you sooner, your wisdom, your sweetness—oh, if even now——”

“Hush! Mr. Purkiss. You are mad.”

“I have been mad hitherto, but now I am sane—and wretched. See—I am going to leave you; for how can I plead? Why should you believe me? Yet, Alice, I love you—you only. I may never deserve you, sweet angel; but no one else shall ever be my wife. Farewell; and when you hear that I have made another choice, despise—forget me!”

“My dear Dick.—Are you engaged?  
“Yours impatiently,

“RICHARD PURKISS.”

(Ans.)

“My dear Uncle. Busily engaged. I have been affianced to eight of your fair friends, and have now to seek your blessing on my union with the beloved *anthe*!

“Your dutiful nephew,

“DICK.”

The marriage-feast passed off admirably. I was not alone in my glory. Sir Hugh Sagramore and Mr. Lowry found brides the same day. Adelaide and the rest were bridesmaids. A diamond bracelet, thirteen laced pocket-handkerchiefs, two fans, and a silver spoon, were mysteriously missed, and as mysteriously restored, at night, to their owners.

My sweet wife and I returned to England



last week. Dear Alice is in perfect health, and little Master Dick is to be christened on Tuesday. We invite you all.

### THE ALMOND-TREE.

SPENDTHRIFT of Spring, why in the keen bright air  
Thou squander all thy blossoms in the sun?  
Thou art too heedless of the swift-winged care  
That will o'ertake thee ere the month outrun.  
Flowers before leaves? That is not husbandry.  
Laugh at sorrow with thy blushing flowers.  
Beware, beware! Already in yon cloud  
The frost is gathering all its subtle powers.  
Be not then still so heedless and so proud,  
Lest thou, perchance, some rosy morn in May  
(Palsied and trembling with an unseen blight),  
Shalt wake and shudder at the cruel day  
Of doom, that ends thy pleasure and brings night.  
Be wise, beware old Winter's frozen breath,  
Thy smiles will not appease the tyrant Death.

## THE SECOND MRS. TILLOTSON.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NEVER FORGOTTEN."

### BOOK IV.

#### CHAPTER XXVII. CONFUSION.

THE cruel furies had now finally entered into that house. Friends, acquaintances, servants particularly, were all coming to the knowledge of there being something wrong. This truth might be gathered from Mr. Tillotson's worn and despairing face. All his friends told him that if he didn't take care "he would break down."

He had but one purpose, which he was carrying out.

About ten days later, Captain Diamond came limping up with a bright face and a sense of importance quite unusual with him. He asked for Mrs. Tillotson, but she was out. Mr. Tillotson was, as usual, in his study. "Egad, that'll do for me as well," said the captain, getting off his high-collared great-coat. "And how have you been, Martha? I declare you are looking as young as you were six years ago. You'll see, Martha, that no one runs away with my third leg. Egad, it's better to me than number two leg!" He then went into the study.

He started back when he saw his friend. "My dear fellow, what have you been doing to yourself? What's all this?"

"Sit down," said the other; "this is very kind of you. I have so few friends now."

"But," said the captain, in real distress, "this isn't the thing at all, at all. Why, you've two pink spots here the size of half-a-crown. Ah, now," added the captain, testily, "this is the old thing again, playing the deuce with yourself. It'll end badly, I tell you. Once you take what they called the green-eyed fellow into your head, it's all gone with you. I could tell you a story of that, about Bouchier, as nice and open-hearted a fellow as ever put on a shako, and who married as elegant a woman as you could pick out. My dear fellow, that young woman loved him as well as you'd love your

father or mother; and Bouchier took it into his head to be jealous of a little major we had, a creature with no harm in him. Ah, but this is one of Tom's long stories. It didn't end well."

"I dare say not," said Mr. Tillotson, gloomily, "neither will this end well. But I have done with explanations; I have only too certain proof. O, Diamond, to think of her, for whom I have suffered so much! To think of her first deceiving me, and then plotting with adventurers to ruin and expose her own husband! I was a fool, and knew very little of life, to think that she would get to love me."

"Folly, folly, folly," said the captain, moving restlessly on his chair. "She dotes on you. I know it. And, as for all these suspicions, I have got something with me that will prove what I say. The fact is, we are going to get that wild scamp out of the country."

Tillotson started.

"Ah, ah!" said the captain, with triumph. "That's something like! Is old Tom the Boijo after that?" Then he proceeded to tell how he had applied to General Cameron and other friends, and how, only last night, he had got an answer from the general, who was "as fine a trump of a man as ever pulled a belt."

"Look here, Tillotson. Just listen to this," said the captain, getting on his spectacles; "he's a true blue;" and the captain read:

"My dear Diamond. I got yours in the country here, where it was sent on to me. I was very glad to see your old handwriting, my dear Tom, and indeed I have not forgotten you or the old Fiftieth days.

"I am very glad you have thought of your old friend Cameron; only I wish to Heaven you'd ask something for yourself, and not—as you always were doing—for some one else.

"Of course, we shall do something for your friend. They are organising a new mounted police force at the island, and we want a dashing savage fellow that has been in the army. From what you say, I dare say your fellow would be just the thing for a captain. The island will give a good salary—eight hundred. So I tell you what. I shall be in town on Monday, and you can come to me at the club and take your bit of dinner, and we'll talk it over, and also the poor fellows that we all knew in the old 'half-hundred' and had such nights with."

"There," said the captain, folding it up. "Think of a high-up fellow like that, in the Bath too, with his aiderkongs about him, recollecting an old spanchelled foosterer in lodgings, like me! Well, let me tell you now. I went off at once, this morning, lame leg and all, to Ross, and saw him too; and faith, didn't he take to it at once? I knew he'd like riding about the country and hunting down the rascals. He's ready to go in a week."

Something like pleasure came into Tillotson's face. "If this be so," he said, "there is some hope. But what will *she* say? Do you suppose she will consent?"

"My dear friend," said the captain, eagerly,

"it's all *her* doing! Planned every bit of it, lock, stock, and barrel. She came to me and proposed it, and we put our heads together, and mapped it all out."

A groan came from Mr. Tillotson. "Ah, exactly. I thought so. It only wanted that."

"My God!" said the captain, aghast, "what's this, now?"

"I see it all!" said the other, excitedly; "a well-contrived scheme, to be sure. How dull of me! Can't you follow? Oh Heaven, heavens! Can't she leave me at once, and go away without torturing me in this way? This is conclusive. But I shall baffle them yet; I shall not be pointed out, or laughed at by the world."

"What are you talking of?"

"Listen. Not three weeks ago, she came to me with a proposal to go off to Italy *by herself*, do you see, for her pleasure or health. Now she proposes that *he* is to go. Don't you follow? Is it not cruel, cruel?"

He seemed to the captain to speak like a frantic man. His hands shook. Light gleamed from his eyes. All the captain's common forms of comfort forsook him, and he sat staring at his friend quite aghast.

"Now I have discovered the plot; thanks to you, my dear friend," continued Mr. Tillotson, pacing up and down furiously; "just in time. Not a word now, as you value my happiness. I shall watch them. This explains everything."

"But what makes you think so?" said the captain.

"Everything," answered the other, fiercely. "You cannot know. They have kept me in the dark all this time. She married me under a pretence of liking me; and I was fool enough to trust her! Why, in that desk, this moment, are letters of his; frantic lover's letters, written years ago! They kept all this from me; but they shall keep nothing else. And, worse than that, you know that old business which has been the misery of my life. God knows, I have tried to atone for it; and if penitence and suffering can atone——"

"To be sure—to be sure," said the captain. "You may say *that*, my poor fellow!"

"What do you say to a wife turning herself into a detective, leaguings with ruffians, planning it all, giving them money to buy up my secret from them? And she has it now, knows it all, and taunted me with it the other day."

The captain still could not find a word to say. He was in deep pain and distress, for it seemed to him that his friend was indeed "astray." He saw, too, that it would be useless to make further protest, so he rose to go.

"How hot you are!" he said, as he took his friend's hand; "why, man, you are in a fever."

"You," said the other, bringing him back, "are the only one I can depend on. *You* are true; if I should get ill and become helpless, *you* will watch for me, carefully and jealously, and report everything to me. Mind, I depend on you. For it will be their opportunity."

This was indeed a prophetic precaution. All through that day Mr. Tillotson struggled through an oppressive sense of coming sickness; and,

after a severe battle, was next day struck down by the rising tide of a nervous fever.

#### CHAPTER XXVIII. MR. TILNEY SERVES THE BANK.

Now began the formalities of a regular sickness. The doctors came, and among them Sir Duncan Dennison, that "tip-top medical man," who was brought by the captain. He shook his head, and pointed to his own forehead. "Bad, bad, my dear captain; therein the mind must minister to itself!" To which the captain listening as if they were talismans of gold, assented with an eager "O yes, of course, doctor;" though they seemed mysterious and unintelligible. But though suffering and for a time in danger, the patient fought a strong battle by force of will, and fought off the enervating influences of his malady with indomitable energy. At times his senses were stolen away.

Then Mrs. Tillotson, a faithful but impassive nurse, heard strange speeches from him, in which her name was mixed up, and the words "cruel," "faithless," "heartless," and with much self-accusation as being "betrayed," and the most miserable of men. She went through her duties faithfully, was the most assiduous of nurses, but with cold impassiveness, and almost sternness.

The friends of Mr. Tillotson came frequently, seriously concerned for his state. Mr. Tilney often dropped in and sat in a great arm-chair down in the drawing-room, sometimes refreshing himself from a decanter of sherry, and sometimes turning the chair into a pulpit, saying that man's life was but a Valley of the Shadow, that here we were yesterday, and to-day there we were down upon our backs like infants. There was our poor friend up there, like a flower. With this train of reflection stimulated by other resources, Mr. Tilney began to think he was contributing essentially to the restoration of the patient. "We are pulling him through," he would say, in his arm-chair.

The captain was far more practical, as, indeed, Mrs. Tillotson found. Once or twice Ross came, but was not admitted, chiefly by Diamond's firmness, who heard the angry voice in the hall, and went down himself to meet him. Indeed, the captain seemed to have an influence over him which no one else had; always meeting him with a good common sense and a manly independence which awed him.

After one of these interviews, the captain came in to Mrs. Tillotson. To that lady, indeed, he was a little cold and distant of late—a distinction she remarked at once. The captain came to her with a sort of apology. "You know," said he, "he—poor Tillotson—so charged me to see that he did not come in, and I promised him, you know, on my book-oath. You know, my dear, it doesn't *do* while he's sick; and, indeed, now, if you would take an old fellow's advice, you would just have done for good and all with this fellow Ross, and send him to the right about at once."

The golden-haired girl looked at him with cold blue eyes. "So, you have caught this tone," she said, sadly. "They have told *you*

the story. Well, the difference is not much, nor shall it be for long."

"No, no," said the captain, in eager protest, "nothing of the kind; only I was so sorry to see things going in this poor sort of way. It's a miserable state of things."

"It is," said she; "but it is none of my doing. Some miserable spirit has come between him and me. I shall do my duty now, as I always have done by him. But after he is restored to health and strength, it shall all end. I cannot endure this treatment—these suspicions—when I am conscious of having done no wrong. I have friends, thank God, who will receive me. I have tried everything, even to the surmounting of what few women would have surmounted. Suppose, indeed, I were the injured one. But, as I say, it must all end now. I see it is hopeless to combat what is on his mind."

The captain was aghast, and could not say a word.

She went on: "I know what I owe to myself and to my dignity. I am secure in the knowledge of my own faith and honour. I should not condescend to comply with that cruel order not to speak to that poor outcast, Ross. While my husband is ill, I shall be all he wishes; but when he is restored, he has no title to expect that I should be so harsh and unkind. I cannot do it!"

The captain was amazed. He had never heard her speak in that independent style before.

Grainger, too, came at times, and Mrs. Tillotson received him with kindness. "I have been seeing Ross," he said, "and keeping him quiet. He shall not trouble you, don't be afraid. I have talked to him again and again, and I think he rather looks forward to the prospect of going out into this wild life, if he would only take care of himself. But at this moment he is leading a strange existence, and, I suppose, will kill himself ultimately. However, that we can't control. I hope, if I can be of the slightest profit, you will make use of me."

Still Tillotson mended slowly. His wife watched over him night and day. His hot fierce eyes followed her about the room, uncertain who she was. Sometimes his faint voice called her over to him, and in a whisper he said, "I depend on you, Martha. Do not let her out of your sight. I know what she is planning. It is cruel, isn't it? It is she who has reduced me to this. Promise me. Watch her, Martha; put everything down; never let her out of your sight till I get well. Then I can watch for myself."

During this illness of Mr. Tillotson's, which lasted for some weeks, the bank seemed to be proceeding to yet greater prosperity. Its shares were quoted at higher and higher premiums. This prosperity—there could be no mistake—was all owing to the great Lackson, whose influence at the board since Mr. Tillotson's illness had become much more felt. His advice was always put forward with many apologies, and in a deprecatory way. He had his own con-

cerns to look after, which he said were enough for any one's head; but he could not bear to "see money lying in the street at his feet, and not pick it up." Part of this windfall was that project of the Universal Railway Roofing Company, whose contract for the Central Railways was now signed, and sealed, and "brought out." Concessions for roofing in other gigantic works had already been granted. The wretched foreigners wanted money—wanted energy—wanted everything, in fact, that the British capital would supply them with. Lucky Roofing Company! More lucky Fancier Company that "brought out" the Roofing Company! And still more fortunate Lackson, disinterested too, who had generously "put in the way" of the Fancier one of the best jobs known on the Stock Exchange! Mr. Lackson commented forcibly on each successful stage of the undertaking. "Our good friend Tillotson," he said, "would have been against all this. Not that I blame his caution. I think he was right in looking at the matter as he did; but if we had gone on in his way, we should have been left behind, high and dry. The difference is between a beggarly five per cent, which is really not worth picking up, and twenty-five. We shall work the thing up to that yet, or my name is not Lackson. I say, how surprised our poor sick friend will be when he recovers, and finds us twenty per cent better than when he went to bed!"

The members of the board went about with an open complacency, rubbing their hands at having got such "a good thing." The great Lackson promised, indeed, to put them up to many "a good thing" before he was "done with them." Their old rival was furious at this known success; but the old rival's secretary, looking out sharply, pooh-poohed and pished the whole affair, and kept saying, "Only wait!"

Shares in the New Roofing Company were to be allotted by a certain day. Not a single application, it was sternly hinted, would be entertained after that day, even from Majesty itself. When this work was done, men went about cruelly bewailing themselves as if they had been treated with injustice. They had asked for five hundred, and been "put off" with two hundred; they had applied for five thousand shares, and had been "fobbed off" with one thousand. The grand speculator, with his hand in his breeches-pocket, made a contemptuous protest against the high-handed behaviour of the great Lackson. The fellow was losing his head, he said.

The success of the Fancier was the more remarkable, as at this season there was the crash of earthquakes going on among many financial undertakings. Some of them were standing in the morning, new, fresh, brilliant, and by the setting sun were only a heap of ruins. When a great tower fell, it had a fatal influence that spread far and wide, and the shock shattered innumerable little banking cottages miles away up and down the country. But the great Fancier towered above them all; and this extraordinary luck was the more remarkable, as trade was much disturbed, and strikes were being medi-

tated in the coal-fields, and even in the iron-works.

Meanwhile, Ross came again and again. Once he burst into the parlour, and insisted on seeing the captain.

"What do they keep me out for?" he said, furiously. "Am I a housebreaker? Do they think I shall steal all the furniture? Well, how's our sick man?"

"O, he's doing well," said the captain. "Sir Duncan says he'll be round again in a fortnight. But I tell you what, my friend, you should be packing up now. His excellency is not a man to stand shilly-shallying. And, if you're not up to time, I can tell you—"

"Ah, Diamond," said the other, "I know all that. I've seen his excellency, as you call him. Would you have me go away when a dear friend is in this state? Dear Tillotson, eh? I don't bear him malice, poor devil! But that poor girl up-stairs, what's to become of her? I dare say he suffers enough—more than I wish him. I declare, this moment, if it would be any ease or comfort to him, I'd just walk up to his bedside and put out my hand to him. I would, though you don't think so."

"Not to be thought of for a moment," said the captain, in some alarm. "As for his dying, that's all over. He's mending every hour, God be thanked! Sir Duncan says he'll be out driving about in a week."

"He will, will he?" said Ross, starting up; "and beginning his old game, I suppose. No doubt. With all my heart, then. I am not sorry. Let him live as long as he can; but I'll be even with him yet. What's this tyranny," he said, with sudden anger, "keeping me from seeing her? Are we all children? Am I not going away? What's at the bottom of it? What are you all afraid of?"

"Yes," said the captain, gravely, "you have given your promise, as a man of honour, to go. I am bound for you myself."

"And who says I *would* go back from what I say? I am longing to have the whipping and scourging of those savages. What a policeman I shall make! I shall put by money, come back in four or five years, and then we shall see what will become of this sham-sick Tillotson? I have seen the general. But I am not obliged to rush off to the train, and break my neck getting down to Southampton. There's lots of time yet. As for going without seeing *her*, that I will not."

"Well," said the captain, "you'll do splendidly yet, for you have 'go' in you, and will come home one of these days a tip-top fellow—with lots of money, too."

"Ah, *that* I will," he said, fiercely, "you may depend on it. I'll come back one of these days and pay off all whom I owe anything to, splendidly. I'll scrape and hoard, and live decently and orderly, and even reform, sir, all for *that*. You may depend on me. I'm to fix the time for sailing to-day. I hope he'll live and get strong, and last

out a few years, all for *that*." Then, suddenly changing his voice, he said, softly, "Ah! this is all ranting and raving, I suppose. I have only a fortnight or ten days before me to stay in old England. So now, captain, don't be harassing a poor outcast devil with watchings and spyings. I *must* see her. I shall not see her for years, I can tell you. There are very few fellows would be as moderate and well behaved as I am. So, now, don't be stiff and pitiless. I'm down enough, God knows!"

The captain was moved. "Keep up, my man," he said. "It will all do well yet. Though, as to seeing *her*, that's entirely for herself. But she'll do whatever is right, depend on it. Give me your hand, my dear lad, and keep up."

Meanwhile, Mr. Tillotson had been mending slowly. The Queen's physician—always an amateur of fine women—took Mrs. Tillotson's hand in his, and said:

"Don't worry yourself, my dear, any more. He is over it all."

"There is no danger—no chance of returning danger?" asked the golden-haired lady.

"Not in the least. He'll be stronger than he was. I'll be down with him at the bank, and get him to allot me some shares before a very few days are over."

Mrs. Tillotson, cold, unflinching in her duty night and day, never relaxed in her work. It had come to one evening, when she was sitting below in her drawing-room, after Sir Duncan had gone, who had said that the patient might be "sitting up" in three or four days. It was dark, and growing darker, and she had sat on in her favourite attitude, her round face leant upon her hand, in a deep reverie. Was she thinking of the course she would adopt for her future life, when things fell back to their old position? Suddenly she heard a heavy step behind her, and some one entered hastily. Though it was dark, she knew the voice.

"Ada," he said, sadly, "well, it has come at last. I have to go now, and have come to say good-bye. That woman would not let me in. But I was determined—"

She listened without speaking for a moment. "And when is this?" she asked. "When must you go?"

"To-morrow night," he said, flinging himself into a chair. "Down to Southampton. Well, they have driven me out at last, you see. I suppose they'll consider me beaten. Yet, if I had stayed here longer, I must have rotted away or starved. And now, what do you mean to do? I am doing this for *you*, to let you enjoy peace and domestic happiness with him."

She sighed.

"Yes, it is for the best," she said. "You will grow wiser and more subdued, and govern yourself. In time you will forget all the past. You have made me happy by this wise resolve. It would have ended miserably if you had stayed."

"Ah, but," said he, with sudden ferocity, "don't be too sure that it won't yet. I am only going for a time—a few years. I have forgotten nothing, and shall forget nothing. I shall return; and if I hear a breath, a whisper,



of that man's treating you with unkindness, no matter how great the distance, as sure as I am alive, if I have strength to crawl, I'll come over and punish *that* man."

"Hush!" said she, looking round in alarm; "this is the old insanity; but I have hope and confidence, and can forgive these wild bursts."

"Ah, that's what *you* call them," he said, bitterly; "that's your name and your work too. Whatever I turn out, and if I end badly and violently, which I know I shall, you were the beginning and are the end of it. You deceived and betrayed me."

"I?" she said, trembling.

"Yes, you," he said. "I might have been one of your steady model decent citizens, but for you. You were mine, and pledged to me from the beginning. I looked on you as mine; but you sold yourself, as many a woman has done before—was bought with his banking money; and a man that has left me this" (pointing to his scar), "before God, I'll come back and reckon with him. O Ada, how I have loved you all this time! and I tell you this one thing, you shall be mine yet, one of these days."

"No, no," she said, in the same mournful voice; "we have each our lot, and must go through it. All that is over now; it has come too late."

"As the tree falls, eh? Nothing of the kind. You were not born to be miserable, to be chained to that man—a wretch," he continued, with growing excitement, "that if his history were once known, the common police would enter the house and drag him away to a jail. It's true, by Heaven!"

Trembling again, and with a faltering voice, she said, "I do not want to know these things. He is my husband. Only because you are going away do I dare listen to you."

"What prevents me?" continued the other, pacing up and down furiously. "Better men than he have been dragged from a fever to a prison. Only you, and you alone, Ada, have kept me from this. I was thinking over it nights and nights ago. Nothing kept me but *you*, my poor sweet sacrificed Ada. O, you will never know how I have loved you. Under all my rudeness and roughness, which you could not understand, I did, indeed, love you; only my wretched pride would not let me show it. But what is that to you now? And how can you so patiently put up with this miserable man, whom you should learn to despise? who is beneath you morally, whom it is not fit you should stay with—" He paused.

"It is my lot—it is my duty," she answered, calmly. "This is the last time we meet, so you can speak as you will; but you know me well enough by this time to be aware that I am not moved by such things. We must part now; and if I am responsible (as I believe I am, through a fatal mistake) for these troubles, you will forgive me, and I shall pray for you, and we shall look forward to happier days."

At that moment the servant came in with a lamp, and a letter to Mr. Tiltotson, which he set down before her. She opened it mechanically,

as she had latterly done his letters—saw that it was headed "Foncier Bank," like a hundred such circulars and notices of board meetings, as had come regularly within the last fortnight or three weeks. She threw it from her. "Good-bye, dearest Ross," she said, with infinite tenderness; "I have reason, indeed, to ask your forgiveness. Cease to think of me; look forward to a new and bright future, and I shall pray every day for your happiness."

Ross looked at her a moment, and then caught her in his arms. He held her there long. She was powerless to free herself. "I cannot go," he said; "I shall not go. I cannot leave you here; or, if I do, I shall end miserably; do something desperate. It is *you* who have brought me to this."

She gave him one sad look, freed herself, and had fled from the room.

"Wait! Stay!" he called after her, in an agony, "a moment;" but she was gone. He was pacing up and down in a fury. "Come back! come back!" he cried; "I can't lose you. Curse on him that has done all this cruel work! I shall be even with him yet for all this, and before I go, too, if I could find any way." And he looked round and round the room as if for a victim.

The cheery voice of Mr. Tilney was now heard at the door. "Ross here?" he cried. "Well, well; it seems we are doing well upstairs—right well. I am very glad of it. It should be a lesson to you, my boy. When you have once anchored your hope up there in a sure and certain immortality, you are—you are," added Mr. Tilney, embarrassed by forgetting what followed, "you are—all right."

Ross scarcely heard him. "I shall be even with him yet," he was muttering.

"What's this?" said Mr. Tilney, taking up the Foncier Secretary's letter, "something from my old bank. Dear me, the days when I was a director, and signing cheques like wildfire. I come and help *her* in all these business matters. What can girls know?" Mr. Tilney got out his spectacles and prepared to read.

Sitting down in the arm-chair, and reading this document, with Ross pacing round the room, Mr. Tilney broke out suddenly in agitation: "My goodness! Heaven above us! What is all this?"—involved in the most helpless manner! Salvation depends on not a whisper escaping. Burn this—" And Mr. Tilney, with his glasses dropping helplessly from his nose, could only turn the letter upside down, and say incoherently the words, "Providence," "Shape our ends," "Sparrow falls."

Ross had caught the words; in a second had twitched the letter from him; in a second more had read it with gleaming eyes through to the end; and while Mr. Tilney was gasping and muttering his devout common-places, had, with a stamp and a cry of triumph, rushed away.

#### CHAPTER XXIX. THE FONCIER TOTTERS.

IN the full rush and flush of its prosperity, with its shares at eight or ten per cent premium, the Foncier seemed to deserve the envy with which its happy course was followed.

The great Lackson was now virtually acting chairman, not by force of election, but by the more powerful moral influence of success and personal ability. The shareholders said to each other that, after all, it was lucky enough that Tillotson and the "slow-coach" policy had been shelved for a time. The great Lackson himself, still modest and utterly unexcited, now and again threw out hints about a new El Dorado that would all but dazzle their financial eyes—something to which the Roofing Company was a mere faltering rushlight. *That* was a mere experiment. They were only feeling their way. The ultimate end that he saw was universal *absorption*—a gradual but gentle devouring of every existing institution of the sort. His colleagues were fretted and goaded by these gorgeous glimpses, and at last one day he was prevailed on to hint at a scheme for a great Persian Bank concession from the Shah; diamonds and rich stuffs, and all the costly wares of the East, to be taken as securities; loans to the Shah and to the emirs on their personal security. The whole thing was in train; but before this splendid scheme was matured, some other events were to occur.

There had been disputes between masters and workmen in the iron country which had now gone on for some time without settlement, until at last it came to the usual issue—a strike. This began with a mine or two, and a foundry or two; but was spreading slowly. The first mine-owner and the first foundry-proprietor were beaten in the struggle, and had given in; which was only a bonus held out to the others, and soon the whole trade was on strike.

The secretary of the old company, looking with rage and jealousy on the progress of the Foncier, saw what profit was to be made of the affair, and began to whisper. How would the Roofing Company, or rather the Foncier, for it was the same thing, carry out their contract *now*? The contract was signed long ago, a given time fixed, and not an ounce of iron bought yet! In a few days other people began to make the same remarks.

When the directors met the great Lackson, he only smiled at them. Just what he anticipated. His agents were at work, he said, buying up shares hard and fast. Let the fools sell. In a week the strike would be over; up would go their shares, and who would be holding them then? This view was all very well, but it did not reassure the men of business. The hard-headed old cashier and deputy manager, who had been in banks all his life, and who had always looked grave at the "dashing" proceedings of the great Lackson, told some of the directors privately, that he had made inquiries, and that the great Lackson's agent had not bought a single share of the Roofing Company, nay, that he had been eagerly offering them for sale. In financial operations, a feather, the weight even of a bank-note, becomes a stronger and more substantial argument than premises carried out to most logical and irrefragable conclusion. The rumour, whispered diligently and sent abroad by designing persons that the Foncier and

the Roofing Company were virtually one, being financially bone of each other's bone, had begun to be accepted generally; and one day it was found that the shares of the great Foncier were beginning to fall slowly, first to a less pleasing premium, then to par, and then to discount. These were indeed evil days for the gorgeous tabernacle—for "Middle-age Jenkinson's" pigeon-holes and sentry-boxes, his arcades and plate-glass, his inverted frigate hulk which did duty as a roof, the mahogany and magnificence within, and for the forty thousand pounds paid for the site.

There was a panic among the directors as if the cholera had come among them, and that day the great Lackson being absent, having caught a heavy cold and lumbago at a grand City dinner, the ancient cashier came with one of his ledgers, and in a calm grave way said he thought it was his duty to call the board's attention to the state of Mr. Lackson's "private account."

For the "good of the bank," it had been found expedient that the great Lackson should draw largely and without restraint, and the board, now looking through his account, were startled by the enormous sums that had been drawn out and "placed" in his name. Latterly, in the unbounded enthusiasm and confidence which the success of the great Lackson had excited, his proposal to bring some of his numerous undertakings into connexion with the bank had been accepted as a favour. Now, in a panic and flutter, though indeed there was no reasonable grounds for immediate danger, it seemed almost certain that there was ruin and dishonesty coming, and the lumbago and heavy cold of this herculean Lackson, who had often boasted that "he never had been ill in his life," was the worst of all the symptoms.

What was to be done? The ancient cashier was shut up with the secretary for two or three hours until it got to five o'clock, and by that hour they had discovered enough to make their suspicious matter of perfect certainty.

What was to be done? Some one had gone to the great Lackson, but could only see his wife at her grand house, who said that Mr. Lackson was very ill indeed, and could not be disturbed. Then they thought of Mr. Tillotson; he could restore order, or at least could give help, and they wrote off a hasty note:

(Private.) Foncier Bank, Five o'clock.

My dear Tillotson. We have been looking into the affairs of the bank, and have made some discoveries which you should know of. I hear you are well enough to see people. I mean to call upon you about nine o'clock to-night, I cannot go into detail here, but I will only say that Lackson seems to have involved us in the most helpless manner. Things, however, I trust, will turn out better. But our whole salvation depends on not a whisper getting abroad until we can see our way. So burn this the instant you have read it. For I hear that Smith is going about shaking his head, and saying things about us. But I need not

caution *you*. I need not remind you that your fortune stands or falls with ours, that your means are bound up with ours, and that we must all stand or fall together."

This was the letter that Mrs. Tillotson had opened so carelessly, and dismissed as a formal circular for the routine Foncier's meeting. This, alas! was the letter that she had left down on the table when she quitted the room after parting with Ross; and this was the letter on which Ross's furious eyes fell, the perusal of which made him quit the room with triumph.

Late that night arrived the secretary, anxious and feverish. Could he see Mr. Tillotson? He had made an appointment by letter. It was about the bank. But Mr. Tillotson was worse, could not see any one, especially on business. The doctor had given strict orders. Well, then, could he see Mrs. Tillotson?

Mrs. Tillotson came down with pale and compressed lips. She had indeed gone to her husband shortly after Ross had left. "Now" she said to herself, "all is at an end, happily. I shall go through what is my duty to the very end. Now that poor Ross is gone it will be easier, and he will have no cause for complaint."

On the stairs she met that grim servant, Martha Malcolm, coming down from Mr. Tillotson's room, who gave her one of her hard stony looks, that latterly reached almost to disrespect. Mrs. Tillotson had now begun to have an instinct that this woman had been watching and spying upon her.

Mr. Tillotson was sitting in his chair, weak and helpless; but his eyes seemed fiery, and glared at his wife as she entered. "What is it now?" he said. "Do you wish for anything?"

"Nothing," she answered, calmly. "I came to see how you were, and to read to you."

He almost laughed. "To read to me? I do not deserve all this devotion. No, indeed. How am I? You can see I am as well or as ill as people can desire. You can take back that news, my dear, to those who will be most concerned to hear it. I shall be ill very, very long, I fear, and so shall tax your patience; but it must end, you know, eventually. But then an illness and seclusion has its advantages for others. Yet I shall make an effort to-morrow, and get up and go about and look after my own house. Yes, I shall, if I am to die in the attempt, since there are those so cruel, and heartless, and deceptive, as to take advantage of my miserable state. Go away, as a favour, do. Leave me now, please. I begin to talk so oddly. But I am tired, and want rest."

In terror, but with sympathy in her face, she went up to him to soothe him. He half rose as she came near. "Don't, don't," he said. "I don't ask it from you. Keep it for others. Go, go now, as a favour."

He grew so agitated, that, with a sigh, she went away softly. Listening a moment at the door, she heard him groaning in an agony of mind. "My God," he said, "what are we to do?" Going down, she heard of the bank secretary being below, and saw him.

That gentleman was cautious but very pressing. She was equally firm. Mr. Tillotson could not see any one that night. It was as much as his life was worth. The secretary said that the occasion was pressing and serious, and that it was all-important for Mr. Tillotson's own sake. But she was not to be moved. In the morning, then? It was agreed finally that the secretary should come the first thing in the morning, and "then I must really see him, Mrs. Tillotson, or the matter will be serious. I don't like hinting more, even to you."

But in the morning, Mr. Tillotson, having had a wretched tossing night, was infinitely worse. The Queen's physician had been sent for, and had said, "What's all this? I hope you have kept him quiet, and away from anything to disturb his mind?" and his eye settled a little coldly on that "fine woman," Mrs. Tillotson, whom he had several times "had his eye on" when he found Ross lounging insolently about the drawing-room. The bank secretary arrived early, saw the doctor's carriage, and was told the state of the case.

"What is to be done, then, Mrs. Tillotson?" said he. "I may as well tell you now. There is something wrong in our bank. We have been half the night going through the books, and I can only say, that unless we can obtain a very large sum before a few days, and if a breath gets abroad, we may as well close the doors."

She started. "Can this be true?"

"I wrote him all this yesterday," said the secretary. "Of course you saw it?"

"Never," she said. "Yes, there was some letter came from the bank, but I thought it was one of the circulars——"

"He should have seen it at once," said the secretary, impatiently. "I hope it has not been left about. If so much as a whisper got abroad, there would come a rush, and we should be undone. Only a few days' time, and a sum of money to ease present liabilities and anticipate the crash of that miserable Roofing Company, and we are safe."

She ran to the drawing-room to find the letter, but she searched in vain. It was gone. It was indeed far away from that house. The very night that it had been taken away it was read by other eyes. Ross had once, with his friend Grainger, done some business with the rival bank. They had seen the secretary, and been loud in abuse of the Foncier, a strain never unwelcome to the ears of that officer. This had led to a sort of acquaintance; and Ross on this night, talking aloud to himself, exultant, jubilant, had hurried along to that secretary's house, had seen him, and been made welcome.

With the morning the fatal news was abroad. The rival secretary had dined out the night before at a financial dinner-party, and had there, with much mystery and complacency, insinuated his news. Such financial secrets are never told out like vulgar news; they are put in the shape of shrugs and hints. "Bad business, this. You have heard what's going the round, of course. Worst authority, of course. But, putting two and

two together, and once the roofing business gave way, any one could see. Heard about Lackson, their strong man? Not been seen for days; ill, they say, and Tillotson ill too. No wonder."

These hints led to disclosures in a private interview over the claret, between the rival secretary and a great financial chairman, with whom the rival secretary was anxious to stand well. With him he was quite explicit.

"It's all true, Mr. Wick," he said. Lackson's in America or Norway by this time, and he'll pull them all down." This news was received by the chairman with, "My goodness! seemed always a sound thing. Pity about Lackson, though—a fine head for business. Wish we had him. When he has pulled through all this, we might open to him."

By next morning the town knew the whole story. In the City articles of all the papers were mysterious hints perfectly intelligible to those who were acquainted with the Stock Exchange cabala, and before the bank opened its doors the secretary and officials saw with dismay a crowd of people and a file of carriages waiting to assail them. This they did not care for in itself, but the dangerous significance, and what it portended, was what they dreaded. The truth burst on them. They had been betrayed; or, rather, it was hopeless to keep such a secret as theirs. As for the Roofing Company, that was gone hopelessly, and no one thought of it now. It was a financial corpse, and the sooner the remains were got away and buried, even with indecent haste, the better. But as soon as business began in the Money Market, it was evident that a panic had set in about the stock of the GREAT FONCIER COMPANY.

These were ghastly times for the Foncier Bank, a flutter, hurried meetings, more hurried investigations, proposals for "winding up," for prosecution, for investigation. There were meetings of angry shareholders, and a leading article in the great journal, pointing the moral and showing us all what we were to learn from the instance of the Foncier collapse. The gorgeous building—the masterpiece of "Middle-age Jenkinson"—stood there desolate and closed; and even its finery and magnificence gave it an air like the jewellery on a thief or pickpocket.

While this convulsion was going on, Mr. Tillotson, utterly unconscious of the wreck, was mending again slowly. It was more by a mental effort. There was an eager vitality about him which made him triumph over sickness. But Mrs. Tillotson he motioned from his room with flashing eyes. When he spoke, he said gently, "Don't come to me. You will only expose yourself to danger. Don't let us be acting any longer; and when I get well, I promise you—"

She would only make a grieved protest, and then begin to sit lonely and solitary below in her drawing-room. In three or four days more Sir Duncan said, "We were doing much better, but must be cautious;" and that morning the

secretary to the bank came, and was allowed to see him. He told Mr. Tillotson the whole story of the late break up. "It will take a long time to set right; for we shall be in a perfect mess of law, and winding up, and references, and the rest. We shan't save a sixpence out of the smash. It is very unlucky; for, if the panic hadn't come, and you'd been on your legs, we'd have pulled through even in spite of the Roofing business, and that schemer, Lackson."

Mr. Tillotson heard all the details with an indifference that seemed amazing to the secretary. "Well, you are wonderful," he said; "a true philosopher; just the man for a chairman. I always— But what made you publish the business when I cautioned you so strongly? 'Pon my word, I believe that was what brought it all about."

"I published nothing," said the other, wearily. "I knew nothing to publish."

"O yes," said the other. "You told that man Ross, or gave him my letter, and he showed it to that churl Marshall, and Marshall lost no time in spreading it abroad. A thorough man of business, that. Out of curiosity, Tillotson; why did you do that?"

"Ross showed it," said Mr. Tillotson, with eyes brightening; "how could he get it?"

"The very point," said the secretary; "how could he get it? I wish," he said, rising, "we could have seen you a week ago. Things would have been all square now. I declare I am quite sorry for the poor old Foncier, and get a squeeze about here whenever I pass it by. Not that it affects me—I have had a dozen offers already, and good ones. Good-bye."

Mr. Tillotson was not listening to him. His eyes were fixed on a point on the wall opposite, in an eager speculation. In a moment he rang the bell. "Send up Martha Malcolm," he said.

That grim attendant came up. "Martha," he said, "I want you to try and recollect something that happened during my illness. Try, now, for it is all-important. Was there any letter came here from the bank about four days ago? Try."

Martha answered, promptly, "There was. I brought it up myself, and gave it to her."

"To her?" he repeated, starting.

"And she opened it and read it, and Mr. Ross was sitting there beside her, and that was the day when what I have told you of already, took place."

When she was gone, he burst into an agony, tossing his arms wildly. "This is *all* clear now. Because I come between her and her love, she thinks she cannot punish me enough. She has got my secret, and she has ruined me. But I shall disappoint them," he said, starting up. "I will make one more struggle. Yet I have no one—no one—to watch for me, to help me. I am alone and abandoned to their mercy."

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## A NEW SERIAL STORY,

BY THE AUTHOR OF "LAND AT LAST," "KISSING THE ROD," &c. &c.

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